Arifureta: Volume 4

Chapter 1 : Empire's Soldiers

42 people + Rabbit-ear traveling along the canyon.

Naturally, a lot of demonic beasts tried to attack them but to no avail. Those who tried to attacked the RabbitMan tribe without any exception had their head blown with a flash.

That flash accompanied with gunshot, when looked around you can see a lot of demonic beasts' corpse scattered around Raisen Grand Canyon that make the RabbitMan tribe dumbfounded and stare in awe at Hajime who did this.

Especially the child, they are looking at Hajime's overwhelming strength and see him as their hero with sparkling eyes.

"Fufufu, Hajime-san. The little one are watching you know~ Why don't you wave at them?"

Shia immediately tried to tease Hajime who's already in bad mood because of those child's innocent gaze.

With a vein popped on his head, Hajime silently fired his gun.

DOPANn! DOPANn! DOPANn!

"Awawwawawawawagh!?"

With rubber bullet aimed at her foot, Shia tried to evade it which make her looks like tapdancing. To that spectacle, Shia's father, Kam only reveal a wry smile meanwhile Yue look at her with amazement.

"Ha Ha Ha, so Shia and Hajime already that close. It's looks like… Shia already reach that age huh. It's make father a bit lonely. But if the other is Hajime-dono, then it is a relief…"

Even though her daughter is still shotted at, Kam saw her as if celebrating her departure (as in marriage) with tear forming in the corner of his eyes. The other's tribe member also look at her with warm gaze although her screaming "Help me~" can be heard.

"Wait, all of you. Why is that you conclusion after looking at this situation?"

"… Unbelievable"

As Yue said, it seems the RabbitMan tribe rather lack of common sense and it's already become something natural for this tribe. Though it wasn't known whether it's applied only to Haulia tribe or not.

After walking for a long time, their group finally arrive at the entrance of Raisen Grand Canyon. There are finely built staircase as far as Hajime's "Far Sight" can see. The stairs was built by cutting along the wall and it was the type that make an u-turn every 50 meters. Sea of Trees can be reached after walking around half a day after exiting Raisen Grand Canyon.

While Hajime tried looking at the distance, Shia started to talk with uneasiness in her voice.

" Are there any of empire's Soldiers?"

" N? What can I say about. Although there are the possibility of them getting annihilated already…"

" Th, that is, supposed that there are empire's Soldiers around… Hajime-san… What will you do?"

"? What do you mean by that?"

Hajime tilt his head because he can't understand the question asked by Shia. Rabbit-ear of the Rabbbitmen tribe hear perked because of her question.

"Unlike demonic beasts, the enemy are the empire's Soldiers… human race. The same as Hajime-san. … are you sure you can fight them?"

"Failure rabbit, you, didn't you already see the future?"

"Yes, I am. Hajime confronting the empire's Soldiers…"

"Then… What is the problem?"

"I want to confirm it. To protect us, RabbitMan tribe from the empire's Soldiers and confront the human race. Are you really okay, fighting against humans…"

Having heard Shia's word, the surrounding RabbitMan tribe nervously looking at Hajime. The children can't understand what happened but guessing the serious atmosphere started to alternately looking between the adult tribe members and Hajime restlessly.

However, inside such a serious atmosphere Hajime casually said.

"What is wrong with that?"

"Eh?"

Hajime continue his talk ignoring Shia's confusion.

"Like I said. There is no problem for me to fight against human."

"Th,that's, aren't you come from the same race…"

"Didn't your tribe also chased by the same race (demi-human)"

“That is, well, even if you put it that way…”

“Although, you’re wrong about the basic”

“Basic?”

Shia was tilting her head and the surrounding RabbitMan tribe looked confused.

“Listen, I am employing your tribe to be my guide. So, I’ll be troubled if any of you died so I’ll protect it. It’s not like I was sympathizing you, or I have any kindness to do that. Moreover, I won’t protect you forever. Didn’t you remember that?”

“Ugh, yes… I remember…”

“If so, I’ll protect you until my business in Sea of Trees over. Everything are for my own benefit. Because of that it doesn’t matter if it demonic beasts or humans, if they are tried to obstruct my path, they are enemies and enemies must be killed. Simple as that.”‘

“I, I see…”

Shia consented with a wry smile to that Hajime-like answer. Even if she with “Foresight” saw Hajime confronting the empire, because the future wasn’t absolute she didn’t know if it’ll come true or not. There are others future with higher possibility that she seen, one of it was the future where they become slave under the empire while living a life more painful than death. Because Shia think “it was her fault” even though the others didn’t think so, she tried to do with all of her might to confirm which future they’d be in.

“Ha Ha Ha, It was good to understand that. Please leave it to us to guide you through Sea of Trees.”

Kam was laughing cheerfully. Rathen than some stupid sense of justice, if everything is under the condition of give and take then it’ll be more assuring. His face said it all.

Their party approached the stairs. Hajime gone ahead of them in alert. To escape from the empire’s Soldiers, the RabbitMan tribe haven’t had drink or eat anything, but their steps are light. It seems the rumour that demi-humans who unable to use magic have higher physical strength instead is true.

And finally, Hajime’s group escaped from Raisen Grand canyon.

What they see over the cliff…

“Oioi, seriously. They are survivor. Even though I was reluctantly stay here because of commander order~ If it was like this, I can bring back some good souvenir home.”

There are around 30 Soldiers of empire. Behind them there are a lot of wagons/carriages where marks of camp remained to be seen. All of the Soldiers who dressed in Khaki-like uniform and equipped with a sword or spear and a shield, look surprised at Hajime’s group.

However, that only last for a sec. Immediately they become delighted when they saw the RabbitMan tribe.

“Platoon leader! The gray haired RabbitMan also there! Isn’t she the one commander want?”

“Ooh, it’s look like we are lucky. Even though it’s ok to kill the others old one, that’s the only one you must keep alive.”

“Platoon leader~, there are some women in there, can we taste them a little? We have waited here for 3 days after all. Please overlook it~”

“Geez. Don’t take all of them. If it was only two, no three then it’s okay”

“Hyahho~, as expected of platoon leader! You really can understand us!”

For the empire’s Soldiers, RabbitMan tribe seen only as easy prey for them to catch, they approached while licking their lips looking at female RabbitMans. Seeing those Soldiers, the RabbitMan tribe can do nothing but tremble in fright.

Along those clamoring Soldiers, the man who called platoon leader who’s currently grinning at those RabbitMans finally notice Hajime’s existence.

“Aah? Who are you? It looks like… you’re not a RabbitMan.”

Hajime, who think it was impossible to just pass through those Soldiers, simply respond.

“Aa, I am human”

“Haa~? Why is a human together with RabbitMan? Even coming from the canyon. Aah, are you a slave merchant? Did you hear this information somewhere? What a great business spirit to come here yourself. Well, sorry but hand them over to the empire now”

Assumption come from the platoon leader, although it was natural if you looks at the situation. He also believe that then give order to Hajime.

Of course there is no need for Hajime to follow it.

“I refuse”

“… Did you just say something?”

“Didn’t you hear “I refuse”. Those guy are mine now. I won’t give you even one. I recommend you to give up and go back to your empire now.”

He thought what he hear was a mistake, but he answer back while giving them order. Vein appeared on platoon leader’s head.

“… … boy, mind your word. Is something wrong with your head to not understand who we are?”

“I already know everything. Even you won’t like to be called something wrong with your head right.”

Platoon leader glaring at Hajime after heard his word. The other Soldiers also glared at Hajime creating a tense atmosphere. At that time, the platoon leader probably because of that tense atmosphere finally notice Yue who come from Hajime’s back. Inside the tense atmosphere come a young girl, maybe because of the gap, he was enchanted by her beauty for a moment while looking at her tightly holding Hajime’s clothes, finally smile reappear at his face.

“Aah~ I see, I finally~ understand now. You’re nothing but a naive shitty boy. Let me teach you the severity of this world. Ku ku ku, aren’t that young miss over beautiful. After I chop your limb of, I’ll violate her in front of your eyes then sell her to the slave merchant”

To that word Hajime frown his eyebrows and even from the expressionless Yue, disgust can be felt by everyone who look at her. Yue who can’t forgive that men existence hold out her right hand.

However, it was stopped by Hajime. To the dumbfounded Yue Hajime only say one thing.

“In conclusion you are my enemy, right?”

“Aah!? Did you still not understand the situation! You, bastard should be trembling while seeking forgive-!?”

DOPANn!!

The irritated platoon leader unable to finish his word. The reason is, when one gunshot can be heard, his head was shot. On his head a big hole in the middle of forehead can be seen and brain-matter scattered from the back of his head, then collapsed just like that.

Unable to comprehend what happened, the other soldier can only stare dumbfounded at the platoon leader.

DOPAaaNn!

One gunshot can be heard, and at the same time, six empire’s Soldiers’ head was shotted. Actually it was six shots, but Hajime’s speed was so fast that only one gunshot can be heard.

Naturally, after seen their leader and comrade’s head shotted the Soldiers become panicked then turned their weapon to Hajime. Though they don’t know how, they understood who the cause, what a precise judgement. Personality aside, as expected of empire’s Soldiers. Their ability is real.

The Soldiers immediately move forward while the rear started to chant. However, something immediately rolled over to their feet. A black, cylindrical object. What is this? though they puzzled but it they only looked without interrupting their chant and they turn into corpses in the next moment.

DOGAaNn!!

That's because the black object, "grenade", exploded. Moreover metal pieces burst from it just like a "fragmentation grenade". Compared to the real one, it's power was far stronger. It was only able to be created because of this world's unique ore.

Only with one move, around 10 Soldiers immediately died, with their hands and feet blown off, their organs scattered, in addition seven more figures can be heard groaning in pain.

To the explosion in the back, seven Soldiers who act as vanguard immediately stopped their charge. Wondering what happened, six Soldiers who looked at their back, along with their other companions immediately crumbled because of a shot through their head. Blood sprayed around, however one of them remain alive, having lost his power, and remain at his spot. It was not wonder. Only in a moment, his companions was annihilated. It was not like their forces are weak. In fact, there are some elites who complained having received the orders. Therefore, with an expression asking if he was inside a nightmare, his glance wandering around.

And to his ear, an aloof voice can be heard from the cause of this tragedy.

"Un, as expected, if it was against human there is no need to use "Lightning-clad". The usual bullet and mechanism was enough. Combusting stone is REALLY a convenient one."

That soldier was surprised and start to turned to Hajime in fright. Hajime while tapping Donner to his shoulder, slowly approached that soldier. His figure who brought death along with his fluttering black coat, made him look like a grim reaper. At least it looks like that to the surviving soldier.

"Hii, do-don't come! N-no, I don't want to die. So-someone! Help me!"

That soldier tried plead for his life. His face distorted in fear and liquid leaking from his groin. Hajime look at him coldly and to the soldier who tried to flee, he slowly open fire in succession.

"Hii!"

No impact can be coming to that soldier. What Hajime shot was the Soldiers who was severely injured by the grenades. When he notice it, the last surviving soldier timidly looks around, this time he finally see the disastrous scene of annihilation with his own eyes.

The gun's muzzle finally aimed at the stiffened soldier. Again, his body shook, and with an unbecoming expression he started to plead for his life.

"I, I ask you! Please don't kill me! I, I'll do anything! Please!"

"Is that so? Then. tell me what happened to the other RabbitMans. Even though there should be a lot of them… …have they been transported to the empire?"

What Hajime tried to ask was, it takes time for hundred people along with RabbitMans to move around, so it'll be okay to help them on the way if they are near. Well, if they are already arrived at the empire then there is no need to purposely help them.

"… Wi-will you spare me if I tell you?"

"You, did you think you're in any position to ask me? Well, it's not like I need those information. Should I kill you now?"

"Ple-please wait! I will say it! I will say it! … They are probably have been transported, because we already reach the quota…"

The "quota", in other word those who won't sell, such as elderly was killed. Hearing that word, bitter expression appear on RabbitMans' faces. Hajime take a peek at their expression. Immediately he glance back at the soldier, in his eyes killing intent can be seen.

"Wait! Please wait! I will tell you anything! About the empire or anything you want! So please!"

Having noticed his killing intent, the soldier desperately plead for his life. And, answer his plead was…

DOPANn!

One bullet.

At this all of RabbitMans hold their breath. Added that, Hajime's completely unforgiving behaviour. Fear appear in some of them. Who know if Shia also feel the same, she timidly ask him.

"I-isn't okay to just overlook that person…"

Haa? Hajime glance at her with amazed expression and Shia only can mutter "Ugh". To the one that killed their family members, also tried to enslave them, looks like the RabbitMan tribe can forgive them. When Hajime tried to say something, Yue immediately told them.

"… Once, the weapon was pulled, the result, even if the opponent was strong they'll be inconvenience sooner or later…"

"Th-tha is…"

"… In the first place, how can you look at Hajime with that kind of eyes even though he protected you…"

"…"

It seems Yue was angry. Even though they are protecting them, she won't forgive those who harbor negative feeling toward Hajime. Even though it was natural, the RabbitMan tribe can feel their guilt.

"Fumu, Hajime-dono, I apologize. It's not like we blame you. It just that, for us it was the first time we saw something like that… … that's right, we are only surprised by it."

"Hajime-san, I am sorry."

Having heard Shia and Kam apologize to him representing their tribe, Hajime only waved his hands to tell them not to worry about it.

After that, Hajime go to where the horses and wagons/carriages are then told the RabbitMans to hop on. Even though it take half a day walking to Sea of Trees, since there are horses and wagons/carriages they should use it. He take out the magic-driven 2 wheeler(bike) from the "treasure warehouse" and link it to one of the wagon/carriage. The party continue their course to Sea of Trees.

Also, Yue use wind magic to drop the empire's Soldiers' corpse to the canyon. What lefts are nothing but pool of blood.

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Chapter 2 : Shia's Feelings and Haltina, Sea of Trees

One of 7 Great Dungeons, "Haltina Sea of Trees" where the country of demi-humans Faea Belgaen resided in. Thanks to the magic-driven two wheeler pulling two large carriages and dozens of horses, Hajime and his party able to advance forward with a rather fast pace.

On the two wheeler, Hajime sit behind Yue, while Shia is sit behind him. At first, Shia was told to ride on the carriage, but she insisted to get on the two wheeler. Even though Yue keep beating her, but she keep clinging just like a zombie and finally Yue give up. Shia who finally meet two people that "same" as her, seems wanted to talk about various things. She keep hugging Hajime. It seems Shia like to sit behind Hajime on the two wheeler… and sometime she flail her limbs around! that's what Yue think.

Hajime who was sandwiched between ill-humored Yue and good-humored Shia, only absentmindedly drive the two wheeler.

In that state, Hajime heard Yue's voice.

"… … Hajime, why did you fight by yourself?"

"N?"

Yue was talking about the fight with empire's Soldiers. At that time, after stopping her from using magic, Hajime fought them alone. Even though there'd be no much differences other than Yue "Instant Kill" the Soldiers, she thought Hajime was too eager to fight alone, and that made Yue anxious.

"N~,well, I just wanted to confirm…"

"… … confirm?"

Yue asked him with doubtful face. Shia also start to feel intrigued over his shoulder.

“Aa, that was…”

What Hajime said basically this.

First, Hajime stopped Yue because he wanted to fight the empire’s Soldiers as an “experiment”. Even though it looks like he head-shot all of them, actually he also shot at their armors. Why he did that, because to fight humans using railgun is completely overkill, it’d be too dangerous to use it in town or wherever they are because of its penetrating power. Though there is no problem to turn thugs into dust, it’d penetrate into residence housing and killed whoever inside! something like that, like a complete scum. For Hajime, he didn’t want to become someone who indiscriminately kill unrelated people. So, it was necessary to measure the proper amount of power. After looking at the result of this experiment, he’ll be able to fine-tuning it.

The other reason was to confirm whether there’d hesitation for him to kill humans. Even though he was changedeborn, he have not experience in killing human yet. Therefore, he tried to see his reaction before and after killing those Soldiers. The result is, “he didn’t feel anything about it”. As expected, if they are enemies then he can kill them without mercy.

“And well, even though it was my first murder, when I think that I’ve changed because I didn’t feel anything about it, it make me somewhat sentimental…”

“… … that… Are you okay?”

“Aah, there is no problem. This is the current me, I am just glad that I’ll be able to fight properly from now on.”

Having heard Hajime’s story, Shia was surprised that it was his first murder. At the same time, she admired Yue who was able to noticed the slight change on Hajime (probably only limited to Hajime). And once again, she felt a little lonely because she still doesn’t know anything about them.

“Un, that! Can I hear more about Hajime-san and Yue-san?”

“? Aren’t we talking about it now.”

“Ah, what I want to know wasn’t about your skill but something like why are you inside the Abyss? or what are your objectives? or what have you done until now? I want to know more about you two.”

“… … after you heard it, what then?”

“Even if you ask that, I just want to know. … … I, because of my circumstance, have brought a lot of trouble to my family. I disliked it so much when I was a child… … but of course everyone told me to not mind it and now I don’t hate myself anymore… … even so, I still feel I was an oddball in this world… Therefore, I was happy. When I met the two of you, to find someone with similar existence as me and to know that I’m not alone, this overflowing feeling was… … although it was selfish of me, t-to w-wanted becoming your companion…

… that's why, that, can you tell me more about the two of you… … whatever you can tell me…"

It seems Shia was embarrassed by her own words, her voice became smaller and she tried to hide behind Hajime's back. When Hajime and Yue think of when they meet Shia for the first time, they remember how incredibly happy she was. At that time, Yue was having complex feelings, immediately they tried to save Haulia tribe from the attacking demonic beasts and she found out how they are capable of using magic inside the canyon. Surely, Shia must have been felt anxious since then.

Surely, in this world, those who have the same constitution as demonic beast won't be accepted. It was not impossible to have a sense of camaraderie. Though that was said, for Hajime and Yue, there exist no sense of camaraderie. But… because it'll take some time until they arrived at the Sea of Trees, also because there are nothing to hide and when they think it'll be good to kill some times, Hajime and Yue start to tell their story.

And the result is…

"Ue, sob… cruel, how cruel~, Hajime-san and Yue-san have it hard~. Co-compared to that, I was blessed… Uu~, I didn't lack anything at all~"

She cried. While crying sometime "I was too naive" or "I won't complain anymore" can be heard. Then, naturally, she wipe her face using Hajime's overcoat. Apparently, she thought her circumstance was worst but compared to Hajime and Yue's circumstances, it seems she felt miserable about herself to think that way.

After crying for a while, suddenly Shia clasp her fist and with resolute expression she declared.

"Hajime-san! Yue-san! I have decided! I'll join your travel! From now on, this Shia Haulia under this sun promised to help the two of you! There is no need to be reserved. The tree of us are comrades. Let's overcome the hardship and find the hope together!"

To Shia's sudden declaration, Hajime and Yue only give her a cold look.

"What were the weak and need to be protected rabbit just said? You'll only be a hindrance."

"… … casually changing from "I want to be a comrade" into "comrade"… Shameless rabbit."

"Wh-why the cold look?… … aren't you moved… now that you mention it, please properly call me by my name."

Shia was shaking because her eagerness resulted in their cold look. And additional blow was given.

"… … you, aren't you simply want someone to become your travel companion?"

"!?"

Shia was shocked by his words.

“Once your tribe safety is secured, you, you wanted to stay away from them, right? And come good situation that we who was the “same” showed up, have you decided to go with us? Well, of course having that unusual hair color for a RabbitMan would make it hard to travel alone.”

“… … umm, that, even if you say that… … I only wanted to…”

Maybe because it hit the bull’s eye, Shia stuttered her word. The truth was she already determined that once she gained Hajime’s cooperation and her tribe safety was secured she will leave them. Because as long as she was there, her tribe will be always in dangers. Even now a lot of tribe members were lost. Who know next they will likely be annihilated. Shia was unable to endure it. Of course, her tribe didn’t think so and it’ll only look like she betrayed her tribe. But, “even with that” she already decided it.

At worst, she’ll go alone, but that’d make her tribe even more worried. On the other hand, if she said it was to repay Hajime and Yue who have overwhelming strength, then it will be easier to convince her tribe to let her leave. “Desperation” can be seen in Shia’s behavior and speech now.

Of course, it was true that Shia was interested in Hajime and Yue. As Hajime had said when Shia found out Hajime and Yue were “same” as her, she felt strong sense of camaraderie with them. Even when she thinks about her tribe circumstance, it was as if it was “fate” for Shia to met Hajime and Yue.

“Well, it’s not like I can blame you to think so. Even so, don’t expect anything. Our objective was the Seven Great Dungeons. Most likely the dungeon’s interior infested with monster similar to Abyss. You’ll be instantly killed and that’s the end. Therefore, I won’t allow you to go with us”

“… …”

Hajime’s relentless word make Shia fell silent. Hajime and Yue who were unconcerned about it, continue their attacks.

From then on, Shia was quietly sitting on the two wheeler with an expression that was difficult to read.

After several hours, their party finally arrived at the border of “Haltina Sea of Trees”. From the outside of Sea of Trees, they don’t only see the dense forest, but it seems as soon as they entered they’ll be covered by fog.

“Well then, Hajime-dono, Yue-dono. Please don’t ever part from us in here. Even though it was possible for you to advance by yourself, it’ll be a problem if you get lost here. Also, our destination is in the depth of this forest, under the Great Tree right?”

“Aah, I have only heard about it, it seems there is a way to the real dungeon there.”

Kam was confirming Hajime's destination in the Sea of Trees. What Kam called Great Tree was a huge tree that exist in the depth of "Haltina Sea of Trees", it also called "Great Tree Ua Alt" by demi-humans, and seems like it become a sacred place that no one dare to approached. It was a story they heard from Kam when they escaped from the canyon.

At first, Hajime thought "Haltina Sea of Trees" was one large dungeon, but when he think that if that was true then the wandering demonic beasts would be as strong as the one inside the Abyss, it would be impossible for demi-humans to live there. Even for "Orcus Great Dungeon", they are only able to guessed where is the true entrance. So, he became suspicious when heard about "Great Tree" from Kam.

Kam who nodding at Hajime's word, signaled to the other tribe members to make formation with Hajime in the center.

"Hajime-dono, if possible please erase your presence. Great Tree was a sacred place so there are no one and it was prohibited to approached it, but there is possibility to encounter someone from Faea Belgaen or other inhabitants(villagers). We are wanted person after all so it'd be a problem if they found us."

"Aah, I'll do that. Yue and me are, to some degree, able to do that so it's okay."

Hajime use the skill "Hide Presence". Yue also thinned her presence using the method she create in Abyss.

"-!? This is… … Hajime-dono, if it's possible, can you adjust it to the same as Yue-dono?"

"N? … … something like this?"

"Yes, that is enough. If you hide it as much as a while ago, even we will lose sight of you. No, ah, as expected of you!"

In the first place, although their specs are lower, RabbitMan tribe excel in stealth operation and search operation using sound. And it seems, Yue's skill for hiding her presence that she create in the Abyss was quite excellence to use it on the surface. However, Hajime "Hide Presence" skill was more powerful. If it was at typical place, they'll be able to find him, but inside Sea of Trees, even with RabbitMan tribe's specialty they might be unable to find him.

Having her tribe's specialty surpassed by humans, Kam can only smile wryly. Beside him, Yue was proudly puffed up her chest. Shia was complexed. Probably because of the difference in ability that Hajime just show.

"Then, shall we go?"

Under Kam's words, their party start to advance, Kam and Shia head into Sea of Trees with complex feelings (deppressed).

After a while, they are unable to see the road anymore. Immediately thick fog surround them and their sight was cut off. However, there is no hesitation in Kam's steps. He seems to completely understand their location and direction to take. Although it was not known why,

demi-humans and only demi-humans were able to understand their current location and accurately move around the Sea of Trees.

While advancing, suddenly Kam and his tribe stopped and began to look around their surrounding. There are demonic beasts' presences. Naturally, Hajime and Yue also can feel it. Apparently they are surrounded by demonic beasts. The RabbitMan tribe pick the knives that given by Hajime when they entered the Sea of Trees. If it was the normal, they'll just escape with their ability, but they can't do it now. Tense expression appear on all of the tribe members.

And, suddenly Hajime quickly shook his left hand. Faintly sound of something flew (PASHu) echoes in succession.

Immediately,

DOSA-, DOSA-, DOSA-

"""" KIiiii!?""""

Scream can be heard along with the three sounds of collapsing. And, panic can be felt coming from the fog area, three monkey-like creatures with height around 60 cm and four arm each can be seen moving around.

Yue hold up her hand aiming at one of them then mutter in whisper-like voice.

""Wind Blade""

Having said the name of her magic, wind of blade appear and rushed toward, without any resistance that monkey-look-a-like was slashed apart in the air. Without any chance to scream that monkey-look-a-like fall to the ground.

The other two was moving separately. One of them approached a child, while the other aimed its four arms equipped with sharp claw toward Shia. Shia and the child were instinctively stunned and unable to move. Meanwhile, the nearby adults were yelling… … but that was just baseless worry.

Once again, Hajime shook his left arm and PASHuu! sound can be heard then the head of the monkey-look-a-like that tried to approach Shia and the child struck with countless number of 10 cm long needles.

What Hajime just used was Needlegun that's equipped on his artificial left arm. He got the hint from "Scorpion-look-a-like" that he fought before, then create the Needlegun. To fired it he used "Lightning-clad" though it was not at the level of Donner-Schlag but it has enough power. Even though it only have range of 10 m, it was silent, and added with poison it became convenient to use. It can be said it was one of dark-weapon series. Because they are inside the Sea of Trees and they didn't wanted to attract attention, Donner-Schlag can't be used.

"Th-thank you, Hajime-san"

“Onii-chan, thanks!”

Shia and the child (boy) thanked him. Hajime gesture them not to worry about it. The boy look at him with sparkling eyes, while Shia suddenly dropped her shoulders because she can do nothing but stunned in such times.

Kam only wryly smiled at her. They continued to guide him after being urged by Hajime.

Afterward, even though some demonic beasts come to attack them, Hajime and Yue quietly dealt them. The demonic beasts of the Sea of Trees, who were considered as troublesome by the mass, were not a problem for them.

However, after several hours passed since they enter the Sea of Trees, innumerable presences that can’t be compared to before can be felt, Hajime and his party stopped their advance. Their killing intent and teamwork can’t be compared to the demonic beasts they encounter before. Kam and his tribe start to restlessly search for their location.

And then, a worried and lose expression appear on their face while they gripped their hand. As for Shia, her face became pale.

Hajime and Yue who noticed the other party’s identity, feel that it’ll be troublesome.

The others was

“You are… … why are you together with humans! Tell us from what tribe are you now!”

It was muscular demi-humans with ears and tails similar to a tiger.

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Chapter 3 : Haulia was Shameless as Expected

Humans and demi-humans walking together inside the Sea of Trees.

Having seen that, those tiger-like demi-humans looked at Kam and his tribe as if they are traitors. They readied their double-edged sword while taking a stance. Tens of demi-humans come to surround them while emitting killing intent.

“W-we are…”

Kam who drenched in cold-sweat tried to find them some excuse, at the same time the tiger-like demihumans catches a glance at shia then their eyes opened wide.

“Isn’t that… the white-haired RabbitMan? … … bastard… so you are the Haulia tribe… a disgrace to demi-human race! For years, you’ve deceived us to raised that taboo child, and

this time you brought humans here! What treason! I won't hear any excuses! Everyone will be executed here! Everyone ge-!?"

DOPANn!!

At the time the tiger-like demi-human said no more negotiations and tried to command an attack, Hajime's arm moved, a gunshot along with its flash can be heard then something grazed his cheek, leaving traces of gouged trees as it disappear into depth of the forest.

The tiger-like demi-human that was grazed, froze in place unable to understand what happened. If his ears were located at the side just like human's, it surely would have been blown away. Everyone was stunned by the unknown explosive sound added with an attack so fast they are unable to react.

At that place, Hajime's voice can be heard accompanied by an extraordinary pressure. It was the result of special magic called "Pressure" that directly apply physical pressure to the enemy.

"That attack just now, I can fire it tens times in succession. I already knew how many of you that are surrounding us. You're already in my Kill zone"

"Wh,wh… … the chant…"

Without chanting, to be able to fire invisible attack in succession and to know his comrade's location made that tiger-like demi-human stutter unintentionally. To prove that, Hajime easily pull Schlag and aimed at a certain direction. The tiger-like demi-humans subordinate was in that direction. From the fog a sign of unrest can be felt.

"I won't show any mercy to anyone who tries to interfere. Until they have fulfilled their promise, their lives are under my protection… … don't even think you will get even one of them"

Aside from the pressure, Hajime start to emit his killing intent. The tiger-like demi-humans who was known as thick-headed and war-like were drenched in cold sweat, started to panic and screamed while one of them tried to desperately keep his calm.

(It must be a joke! How, how is this a human! He must be a monster!)

To the tiger-like demi-human who think hard so that he won't lose to the fear, Hajime continued his words while setting up Donner-Schlag.

"However, if you retreat now I won't give chase. If you're not an enemy then there is no reason for me to kill. Well, now choose. Are you gonna be my enemy and meaninglessly annihilated or will you quietly go home?"

The tiger-like demi-human was convinced that the moment he give the order to attack, that flash he saw a while ago will be back. If that happen, there were no chances for them to survive.

The tiger-like demi-human is the captain of the Second Guard of Faea Belgaen. His work was to guard between Faea Belgaen and the surrounding village, it was his pride and resolution in this work to protect his brethren from intruders and demonic beasts. Therefore, it was not easy for him to decide between retreating and his subordinate's lives.

"… … before that, I want to know one thing"

The tiger-like demi-human desperately tried to ask Hajime with his hoarse voice. Hajime urged him to talk with his eyes.

"… … what's your purpose?"

A straightforward question. However, depending on the answer, he implied that he has the resolution to fight even if it'll put a risk to his life. For the tiger-like demi-humans, it was impossible for him to let go anyone who tries to hurt demi-humans living in Faea Belgaen and its surrounding villages, so he bravely stared at Hajime with unyielding eyes.

"The depth of the Sea of Trees, I want to go underneath the Great Tree"

"Underneath the Great Tree… you say? For what purpose?"

The tiger-like demihuman thought whether his purpose was trying to enslave demi-humans, but when he heard his purpose was the sacred place "the Great Tree" he can only give out perplexed look. "The Great Tree" for demi-humans was just one of many place inside the Sea of Trees.

"Over there might be where the true entrance to the Great Dungeon resides. We are traveling to conquer the Seven Great Dungeon. And that is why we employ the Haulia as our guide."

"The real dungeon? Just what are you trying to say? This Sea of Trees is one of the Seven Great Dungeon. The dungeon where no one except the demi-humans can advanced without getting lost."

"Well, that is weird."

"What?"

The tiger-like demi-humans dubiously tried to ask Hajime who confidently declared that.

"For a Great Dungeon, the demonic beasts here are too weak"

"Weak?"

"That's right. For a Great Dungeon's demonic beasts, all of them are suppose to be monstrously strong. At the very least around the level of "Orcus Great Dungeon"'s Abyss. Also…"

"What is it?"

“A Great Dungeons is the place of trial that the “Liberators” left behind. For demi-humans to easily enter the depth, you said? That can’t be called a trial. That’s why it’s weird for the Sea of Trees itself as a Great Dungeon.”

“… …”

The tiger-like demi-humans was unable to hide his confusion after hearing Hajime’s words. That was because he was unable to understand what Hajime means. The Sea of Trees’ demonic beasts’ were weak, “Orcus Great Dungeon”‘s Abyss, the Liberators, trial of the dungeon… were something unknown to him. If it was the usual, he will just say it was “nonsense”.

But, now, in this place, what Hajime said was appropriate. For Hajime who capable to overwhelming them, there is no need to make any excuses. In addition, his words itself strangely made them convinced. The truth is if his objective really was the Great Tree not the demi-humans or Faea Belgaen, rather than meaninglessly throwing his subordinates’ life, it was better for him to reach his objective then leave.

The tiger-like demi-human already decided that. But, he can’t just leave Hajime wander around freely like that. For this matter was already in his hand, therefore the tiger-like demi-human give a proposal to Hajime.

“… … if, you are not planning to harm my country and brethren, I don’t care if you go to the Great Tree, that’s my decision. There is no meaning to meaninglessly throwing my subordinates’ lives after all.”

Having heard his words, there were signs of commotion in the surrounding demi-humans. Because he was overlooking human intruders inside the Sea of Trees.

“However, I also need to ask the First Guard’s captain. In addition I must report to my country. The elder might also know something about your story. If that place truly exist or not, until that known, wait here with us.”

While drenched in cold sweat, the tiger-like demi-humans then stared with strong will that can be seen in his eyes and to his words, Hajime tried to think about it.

It was probably the limit for the tiger-like demihumans. It was heard that intruder coming into the Sea of Trees will be killed without the need to talk. Even now, they must still want to punish Hajime and his party. However, his subordinates’ lives will be lost for sure. To avoid it, and for the sake of not letting a potential danger like Hajime loose he made that proposal.

Hajime was a little impressed by his rational judgement under this situation. After comparing the merit between advancing after annihilating them and having permission thus losing the risk of surrounded by Faea Belgaen… he chose the latter. If the Great Tree isn’t the entrance to the Great Dungeon, it was necessary to continue searching for it. In doing so, it was more convenient to have permission from Faea Belgaen. Of course, there is the risk of them becoming hostile, but that is only if there were no other way. It was not a human-like judgment, it was just too troublesome to search while annihilating them.

“… … I accept it. Your words, report them without any distortion, okay?”

“Of course. Zam! You heard it right! Report it to the elders!”

“Yes, sir!”

Under the tiger-like demi-human’s command, one of the presence was gone. After confirming that, Hajime return Donner-Schlag into their holsters on his thighs while releasing his “Pressure”. The air become normal. Because of this, the tiger-like demi-human who previously looked at Hajime dubiously start to relax while feeling relieved. In their mind, “If it is now!” was the thing some of the demi-humans thought while ready to attack. Hajime who noticed that only fearlessly laughed while giving them a glance.

“Between your attack and mine… do you want try it?”

“… … well. Don’t make any sudden movement you know. We just can’t help but react to it.”

“I know.”

Even though they are still surrounded, finally they arrived at conclusion, Kam and his tribe finally able to sigh in relieved. However, the glance turned to them, a more severe and evil than the one directed at Hajime.

For a while, the oppressive atmosphere filled their surrounding, but maybe because they got tired of it, Yue began to tried to take care of Hajime. Shia who sees their harmony, finally unable to take it then mutter “Me too~”, Hajime can only reveal a forced smile, and the atmosphere start to soften. Inside the enemy territory, suddenly they began to flirt (from demi-humans’ perspective), Hajime can feel their amazed glance pierced at him.

After around one hour. Shia was, currently have her joint locked by Yue saying “Give! I give up~! ” while desperately tap her hand, while the surrounding demi-humans watched them with half-amazed and half-warm gaze, then presences can be felt approaching them quickly.

Tension start to appear again. While Shia was feeling the pain in her joint.

From the fog, several new figures of demi-humans appear. The elderly man who was in the middle especially attracted their attention. Beautifully flowing blonde hair along with his blue eyes that show great knowledge, his body was thin, as if it’ll blow along with the wind. To that dignified appearance, some wrinkles was carved, but that contrast only accentuate his beauty. Above all of that, his ear was long and pointed. He was from the Forest tribe (the so called Elf).

Instantaneously, Hajime guessed he was the existence that was called “Elder”. That guess was right on the spot.

“Fumu, are you that human? What is your name?”

“Hajime. Nagumo Hajime. You?”

Having heard Hajime’s words, the surrounding demi-humans was like “how dare you treat elder like that!” and their resent can be seen. With one hand the man from the Forest tribe calm them down and start to introduced himself.

“I am Alfrerick Hypist. One of elder of Faea Belgaen. Well then, I have heard your request but… before that, I have something to ask. Where did find out about the “Liberators”?”

“Un? From the Abyss of Orcus Great Dungeon, one of Liberators, Oscar Orcus’s hideout.”

Without any purpose, Hajime answered Alfrerick who seems to be interested in the word Liberators. On his side, Alfrerick was astonished although it wasn’t shown on his face. The reason is the word Liberator and Oscar Orcus’ name, only known by some of the elders.

“Fumu, from the Abyss huh… … I haven’t heard it for a long time… … can you prove it?”

Alfrerick asked Hajime that question because there is a possibility where the information was leaked by the upper layer of demi-human. Hajime reveal a difficult expression. Because even though he was told to prove it, he can only show his strength. Yue while tilted her head give Hajime a suggestion.

“… … Hajime, what about Orcus’ relic such as magic stone?”

“Aah! That’s right, if it was that…”

With “Pon” he clasped his hand, and he took out the magic stone with quality that was unobtainable the surface demonic beasts from the “Treasure Box”, then passed it to Alfrerick.

“Th-this is… Magic stone with such purity, I have never seen…”

Even though Alfrerick hide his surprise, the demi-human next to him unintentionally raised his surprised voice.

“Now, this. Once it was ring that used by Orcus…”

As he said it, he showed him Orcus’ ring. Having seen the symbol carved into the ring, Alfrerick eyes were wide opened. And he start to breath slowly to control to his emotion.

“Indeed… … certainly, you have reached Oscar Orkus’ hideout. Even though there are other think I want to ask… … alright. For now it’s okay for you to come to Faea Belgaen. Aah, of course Haulia too.”

Having heard Alfrerick’s words, not only the surrounding demi-humans but also Kam and his Haulia tribe was surprised. Led by the tiger-like demi-human, they started to protest furiously. Well, that’s only natural. One of it was because of humans were invited into the Faeea Belgaen.

“They must be treated as guest. Well they are qualified for that. Also, this is one of the rule that’s been decided by the one with elder’s seat.”

Alfrerick calmed the surrounding with his stern look. However, this time Hajime was the one who protested.

“Wait. Why the hell did you decided my schedule? I am going to the Great Tree, also I have no interest on Faea Belgaen. If there are no others questions, then I’ll go to the Great Tree now.”

“Well, did you know. That is impossible.”

“What did you say?”

In the end, are you going to interfere? is what Hajime thought, but it make Alfrerick look perplexed.

“The fog around the Great Tree is especially thick, even demi-human will be lost there. But there are cycle when the fog become thinner, that’s why you should go there at that time. The next time you can go will be in 10 days. … … even though it was supposed to be known by all of the demi-humans…”

Alfrerick was looking at Hajime saying, “To go there in such time, what were you think?” then Kam the guide was seen. Hajime who heard this fact finally understood and just like Alfrerick stared at Kam. Speaking of Kam…

“Ah”

Exactly, he looks like he just remember it. A vein appear on Hajime.

“Kam?”

“Ah, well, what can I say… … look, a lot has happened, I just forgot about it… I’ve only been there when I was a child, so I was not aware about the cycle…”

Kam who desperately tried to find an excuses start to become flustered, because they can’t take it Hajime and Yue stared at him intently and they became blame the others.

“Eei, Shia, the others too! Why, you are telling us the way! You know about the cycle right!”

“Wh, father, that’s misplaced anger! I was, because father was so confidence, so I thought the cycle must be near… … in other words, it’s father’s fault~!”

“That’s right, even we, Huh? Isn’t that weird? think that, but the chief was so confident about it, so we thought it was our that wrong…”

“Chief, it was because you’re to excited about a random thing…”

Kam who was blamed by Shia who also blamed, while the other RabbitMans try to avert their eyes and casually push the responsibility to other.

“Y-you lot! Is that how family is! This, that, that is! Joint responsibility! Hajime-dono, not only me but please punish all of us!”

“Ah, how dirty! Father is dirty~! Because it’s scary to be punished alone, you tried to drag others!”

“Chief! Please don’t involve us!”

“Idiot! On our way, you’re already see how Hajime-dono is. I absolutely don’t want to be punished alone!”

“You, how can you call yourself a chief!”

RabbitMan tribe was known to have the greatest affection compared to other demi-humans. They are noisily tried to push the responsibility to the other. Just where did their affection go… … as expected of Shia’s family. All of them were shameless rabbits.

With a vein appear, Hajime muttered a word.

“… … Yue”

“N”

Having heard Hajime, Yue take a step forward then hold out her right hand. Having noticed that the Haulia tribe’s expression cramped.

“Wa, please wait, Yue-san! If you want to do it just take it to father!”

“Ha Ha ha, we’ll always be together!”

“The hell with together!”

“Yue-dono, please only hit the chief!”

“It’s not my fault, it’s not my fault, the one at fault was the chief!”

To the Haulia tribe who was in chaos, Yue quietly muttered.

“‘Storm Emperor”

—— Agh——!!!

Those rabbit-ears were flown to the sky. Their screams echoes in the Sea of Trees. Even though their brethren was attacked, Alfrerick and the surrounding demi-humans weren’t mad at all. In fact, they looked at the sky with amazement. From their expression, it seems Haulia tribe’s shamelessness was widely known.

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Chapter 4 : Elders’ Conference

They advance in the dense fog guided by Gil, the tiger-like demi-human.

Their destination is Faea Bergaen. They have walked for an hour with Hajime, Yue, Haulia tribe, and Alfrerick surrounded by the other demi-humans. Apparently, Zam the messenger was using a lot of instant movement.

After walking for a while, they suddenly arrived at a place where the fog was cleared up. Although not all of the fog cleared up, it formed a road that resembled a tunnel inside the fog. If you looked closely, crystals as big as fists were buried at the side of the road that give of blue light. It seems to have the ability to ward off the fog.

Alfrerick who noticed Hajime was focused on the blue crystals starts to explain.

“That was something called Faeadrain crystal. Even though we don’t know the reason, fog and demonic beasts won’t come near it. It was also used to surround Faea Belgaen and its surrounding villages. Well, it was “relatives” for the demonic beasts.”

“I see. Well, it’ll be depressing to be inside the fog all the time. At the very least I would want to dispel the place where I live.”

It seems there won’t be any fog in the town inside the Sea of Trees. It was a good news because they had to wait for ten days inside the Sea of Trees. Yue, who feels the fog is depressing, seems happy after hearing the conversation of the two.

In the meantime, before their eyes a huge gate can be seen. It was made by thick trees intertwined forming an arch, while a pair of wooden doors were placed at a span of 10 meters. The natural wall of trees were there at the minimum height of 30 meters. It gave off the magnificence suitable for demi-human’s “country”.

Gil gave the signal to the demi-humans who seems to be the gatekeepers then the gate opened slightly with heavy sound. From the top of surrounding trees, piercing glances were directed at Hajime and the others. It seems they can’t hide their agitation for the fact that humans were coming. Without Alfrerick, they’ll surely get into trouble with only Gil’s assistance. Perhaps, the Elder came out by himself after predicting that this would happen.

After passing through the gate, there was a different world. There are lot of huge trees with diameter of tens meter, inside the tree was the dwelling and from opened space of tree trunk that looks like windows was overflowed with light of lamps. Dozens of people can be seen walking on the corridors made of thick intertwined branches of trees. On the big vines of trees, there are elevator-like things using the pulley also there huge wooden waterway that set up to hang between trees. The trees itself has the height around 20 stories.

Hajime and Yue were mesmerized with open mouth, fascinated by the beautiful cityscape, the sound of cough “gohon” were heard. Apparently, they didn’t notice that they are stopping Alfrerick tried to bring back their consciousness.

“Fufu, it seems you’ve taken a liking to our hometown, Faea Belgaen.”

Alfrerick loosened his expression in joy. The surrounding demi-humans including Haulia tribe looked somehow proud of it. Hajime who saw their appearance, honestly praised the city.

“Aa, it’s my first time to see such beautiful town. The atmosphere is good, truly a town which splendidly harmonizes with nature.”

“N… … beautiful”

Having heard such straightforward praised without any falsehood, as expected, it made the demi-humans a little surprised. However, having their hometown praised surely made them happy, all of them, tried to avert their face with a “hmpf” while their beast-ears and tails were vigorously moves.

The residents of Faea Belgaen were looking at Hajime and his party with curiosity and avoidance, there are various gazes filled with hatred or perplexity, while they continued to go toward the place that Alfrerick had prepared.

* * *

“… … I see, trial to gain age of gods magic, also about the gods’ game…”

Currently, Hajime and Yue are talking to Alfrerick. The topics were about “Liberators” and the age of gods magic that Hajime heard from Oscar Orcus, also about how he was from different world and is trying to complete the Seven Great Dungeon so that he can get the age of gods magic that able to return him to his world.

Having heard about this world’s gods, there is no change in Alferick’s expression. Hajime who thinks it was strange then asked “This world doesn’t treat demi-humans well, even now” was the answer he heard. It seems even if the gods didn’t got mad, the treatment to demi-humans wouldn’t have changed at all. This place weren’t under the influence of the church neither they have any faith. There is only the appreciation of nature.

After Hajime’s stories were finished, Alfrerick start to talk about laws of the Elder position of Faea Belgaen. It was an oral tradition that is if someone who bore the crest of Seven Great Dungeons appeared then don’t be hostile to them, and if that person were liked then take them to their destination.

The creator of Great Dungeon of “Haltina Sea of Trees” were called Luluo Haltina, the existence who called herself as “Liberators” (she didn’t told them what kind of beings “Liberators” was) also she told them the name of her comrades. It was endlessly told the one tribe that lived before this country was named Faea Belgaen. They must not be hostile because it was advised they must know that those who passed the trial of Great Dungeon are someone who have extraordinary abilities.

Also, Alrerick was able to reacted to the crest of Orcus’ ring because there is a stone monument in which seven crests were carved at the root of the Great Tree where he saw the same crest as that one.

“That means, I’ve passed the qualification…”

From Alfrerick's explanation, the reason to invite human into the stronghold of demi-humans has been understood. However, not all of the demi-humans knows of this story, so it was necessary to tell them in the future.

When Hajime and Alfrerick tried to end their talk, somehow it became noisy downstair. Hajime and the others were currently on the top floor, while Shia and the Haulia tribe were downstair. Apparently, they are arguing against someone. Hajime and Alfrerick looked at each other then stood up at the same time.

Downstair, there were a big bear-like demi-human, a tiger-like demi-human, a fox-like demi-human, a demi-human with wings growing out of their back, and a hairy dwarf-like demi-human who looked insecure were glaring at Haulia tribe. In the corner of the room, Kam was desperately covering Shia. It seems they've already been hit because Shia and Kam cheeks were swollen.

Hajime and Yue who have came downstair sent sharp glare to all of them. The bear-like demi-humans began to speak with an insecure voice.

"Alfrerick… … you bastard, what's the meaning of this. Why did you invite those humans? Those RabbitMan tribe too. To have the taboo child come here… … according to your answer, I will strip you of your seat in the Elders conference."

He seems to desperately restrain his fury. His fists that clasped were trembling. As expected, for demi-humans, humans were their nemesis. Moreover, to invited the Haulia tribe who bore crime of sheltering the taboo child. Not only the bear-like demi-humans, the other demi-humans are staring at Alfrerick."

However, Alfrerick only think that as wind blowing.

"What, I just followed the tradition. All of you are also Elders of various tribes, shouldn't you able to understand the circumstance?"

"The hell with tradition! Aren't those kind of things fake? Even after Faea Belgaen was founded, not even once that happened!"

"Therefore, this time is the first time. That's all. If you are Elders then followed the tradition. That's the law. We are the one who have the Elder seat so why would we disregard the law."

"Then, are you saying that those human youngsters are qualified! The one who so strong that we shouldn't be hostile with!"

"That's so"

Alfrerick only answered in indifferent. The bear-like demi-humans can't believe Alfrerick's words, then stare at Hajime.

In Faea Belgaen, those who become the Elder of various tribes are those who have high ability, and it seems the Elders Conference were council system used to decide the policy of this country where the Elders performs judgement in trial-like manner. Currently, those demi-

humans who gathered here were apparently the current Elders. However, there seems to be a difference in the way they see the tradition.

Although Alfrerick was the type that took the importance of tradition, the other elders might be a little different. Alfrerick was from the Forest tribe, even among demi-humans they have longer lifespan. According to Hajime memory, their average lifespan were around 200 years. If that is so, there is a very large age difference between Alfrerick and the Elders in front of him, in effect, there might also be a difference in their sense of value. By the way, the average lifespan of demi-humans were 100 years.

Because of it, the other Elders beside Alfrerick were unable to endure having humans and criminals in this place.

"… … then, right now, let me test you!"

Having finished his word, the bear-like demi-human suddenly rushed toward Hajime. Because of the suddenness, the others can't react. Alfrerick too, who didn't think he'll attack suddenly, was widen his eyes in surprise.

And in an instant he get in his range, the man who was 2 and half meter with great arms made of lump of muscle, swung his arm toward Hajime.

Even among demi-humans, Bearman tribe were superior in physical and endurance. That great arm was able to break a big tree into two, this destructiveness was the clear distinction that made him the representative of his tribe. Aside from Haulia tribe and Yue, the others were visioning there'd be nothing left of Hajime except lump of flesh.

However, in the next moment, they are frozen because of the impossible spectacle.

ZUDONn!

The fist that swung down and produced a sound of impact were easily grabbed and stopped by Hajime's left arm.

"… … what a lukewarm fist. However, there was killing intent. So, you've prepared, right?"

While saying so, Hajime manipulate his artificial arm using magic to increase his grip. The sound of bear-like demi-human's bones cracking can be heard. Sensing his crisis although he was still surprised, the bear-like demi-human desperately tried to distance himself.

"Guuu! Let go!"

Even though he desperately tried to pull his arm, Hajime who was around half big as him didn't move an inch. Actually, at that time, Hajime transmute metal plate on his shoes into spike that drilled into the floor to secure his position, the bear-like demi-human who didn't know that only can feel Hajime was like an immovable big tree.

Hajime silently pour his magic, then the grip of his artificial arm increased at once.

BAKI!

“Gh!?”

Sound of something broken come from the arm of the bear-like demihuman. Even so there is no scream that can be heard just as expected of an Elder. However, Hajime didn’t missed him became stiffen in pain and astonishment.

His free left arm then thrusted with a Karate-like chop, Hajime immediately dashed into the bear-like demi-human’s bosom.

“Fly”

DOPANn!

His “powerful arm” activated and gunshot came from his artificial arm that moved with a thrust. And, at the same time impact were generated from part of the elbow while a cartridge jumped out and flutter in the air. The fist that already strong to begin with were accelerated to increase the destructive power.

The fist that used mechanism to give it tremendous power were piercing the belly of the bear-like demi-human without mercy, while at the same time it generated shock wave and literally blown him off with full power. The bear-like demi-human, without even a chance to scream, with his body bent into < shape disappeared after break through the wall. After a while, scream can be heard from the ground.

What Hajime used was a shotgun that can be fired from his elbow. The propulsion was possible by using the recoil of shot shell that was built-in, also while shooting Schlag he can use it to shot enemy in the back at the same time. This time the propulsion was used. His “powerful arm” demonstrated its full power.

While everyone stunned and at loss for words, sound of GASHUN! that come out from operating the gimmick can be heard then Hajime look at the other Elders with killing intent.

“Well? Are you my enemies?”

To that words, no one was able to nod.

After Hajime blown off the bear-like demi-human, Alfrerick somehow manage to intercede, so the trampling play by Hajime was avoided. The bear-like demi-human’s internals were ruptured along with almost all of his bone fractured, but it seems his life was saved. Using the most expensive recovery medicine (spending money like a faucet). However, his life as a warrior were finished…

Currently, the Elders, Zell of Tigerman tribe, Mao of Wingedman tribe, Rua of Foxman tribe, Guze of Earthman tribe (commonly called Dwarf), and Alfrerick of Forestman tribe were seated opposite of Hajime. Yue and Kam seated beside Hajime, Shia was seated along the other Haulia tribe clustered behind him.

Expression of Elders, except Alfrerick, were stiff with tension. The bear-like demi-human (called Jin) who had battle prowess of number 1 or 2 was unable to attend because he was instant-killed so neither his hands nor feet can be used.

“Well? What do you want to do with us? I only wanted to go to underneath the Great Tree, if you don’t interfere then I will leave you alone… … the demi-humans was <<…>> thinking if they don’t unite their intention then when the time come, won’t they be troubled if they don’t know which is good? For your information. In the middle of massacre, to consider the distinction between enemies and allies, I am not that kind of good natured person you know.”

Having heard Hajime’s words, the Elders were stunned. They have noticed that it was implied he won’t hesitate to start war against the demi-humans.

“For our incapacitated companion’s sake, first of all this is… … is it possible for us to become friendly?”

Guze muttered with groan along with bitter and crushed expression.

“Huh? What did you say? Aren’t that bear the one who came with killing intent? I was only pay him back. Resulted with him became incapacitated was his own fault.”

“Y-you! Jin was! Jin was only thinking of his country!”

“And, is that why it’s okay to kill someone he met for the first time without talk first?”

“Th-that was! But!”

“Didn’t you misunderstand? I am the victim while that bear is the assailant. Aren’t Elders must judge the crime? Then, that’s why, aren’t that Elder of your the one who made mistake?”

Probably Guze was gotten along well with Jin. Therefore, though he understand in his head that Hajime was right but he was unable to accept it. However, to consider his feeling was not something Hajime would do.

“Guze, though I understood how you feels, but leave it at that. His is a sound argument.”

Having heard Alfrerick’s word of admonishment, Guze who tried to stand up was “DOSUNn” sit down with distorted expression. And currently, he fall into silent sullen.

“This boy, certainly, has one of the crest, his ability also made him able to completed a Great Dungeon. I have admitted that he has the qualification as said in the tradition.”

The one who said that was Elder Rua of Foxman tribe. After his slit eyes looked at Hajime, he looked at other Elders asking what they think.

Having received his gaze, Mao of Wingedman tribe and Zel of Tigerman tribe even though it wasn’t known what they think, they give their consent. On the others behalf, Alfrerick tell Hajime.

“Nagumo Hajime. We of Elder council admitted that you’re a person qualified as said in tradition. Therefore, it is our consensus to not oppose you… … as much as possible, I’ll told them to not lay a hand on you. … … however… …”

“It was not absolute… huh?”

“Aah. As you’ve known, demi-humans don’t think well of humans. Honestly, it can be said that they hate them. The is possibility of someone disregarding the notice from Elders conference. Especially, the tribe of the incapacitated Jin, the Bearman tribe’s anger can’t easily be suppressed so there is a high possibility of it. He is popular after all… …”

“So?”

Hajime’s expression didn’t change even after heard Alfrerick’s words. What’s done is done, He only do what should be done, it can be understood from his eyes. Alfrerick who can understand that, he look back with the will of an Elder.

“I want you spare those who attack you.”

“… … are you asking me to take it easy at those who came with killing intent?”

“That’s right. Isn’t that possible with your power?”

“If it was someone with ability around the level of that bear, I can’t say for sure. However, I won’t take it easy when killing each other. Although I understand your feeling, I can’t relate to your circumstances. If you don’t want your brethren to died, then seriously stop them.”

It was something he cultivated in the Abyss, sense of values to kill it if it was enemies were deeply ingrained in Hajime’s mind. Even he doesn’t know what will happen when killing each other happen. If he take it easy, even cornered mouse can mortally wound the cat. Therefore, Hajime can’t accept Alfrerick’s request.

However, Zel of Tigerman tribe intervent.

“Then, we, let us refused to guide you to underneath the Great Tree. Even though it was tradition, there is no need to guide someone which we didn’t like.”

Having heard his words, Hajime was dumbfounded. From the beginning, he was leave it to Haulia tribe to guide him and there is no intention to seek help from anyone in Faea Belgaen. Even they surely know about that. However, Zel’s next words clarified his intention.

“I don’t think Haulia tribe will be able to guide you. They are criminals. They’ll be judged by Faea Belgaen’s rule. Although we don’t know what had happened, you will be separated here. Their crime was to harbored the child who has the same power as demonic beasts. It was the same as exposing Faea Belgaen into danger. Their execution has already decided in Elders Conference.”

Shia was trembling in tears having heard Zel’s words, while Kam and his tribe were already thoroughly resigned. Even now, no one blame Shia, that’s just how depth their affection is.

“Honored Elders! Somehow, somehow please let my tribe go! Please!”

“Shia! Stop it! We are already prepared. It was not your fault. No one wanted to stay alive so much to the point of selling out a family’s member. It was already talked many times in the Haulia tribe. There is nothing for you to worry about.”

“But, Father!”

Even though Shia desperately beg while prostrating, no words of pardon come from Zel.

“It has already decided. All of Haulia tribe will be executed. Even though if you didn’t escape from Faea Belgaen, it’ll only ended with banishment from harboring the taboo child.”

Shia who cried was comforted by Kam and the others. The decision been decided in Elders Conference was the truth. The other Elders didn’t say anything. Probably because it was a taboo child, to kept concealing such factor of danger in Faea Belgaen made their crime heavy. It also can be said their strong feelings for their family worsen the situation. It was an ironic story.

“And that’s it. With this, aren’t your method to go to the Great Tree were gone? What will you do? Will you leave it to luck to reach it?”

Zel was implying that they should accept the demand if they don’t want that. The other Elders of council also didn’t give any objection. However, Hajime who didn’t even show any bitterness in his expression, told him back as if it was nothing.

“You, are you an idiot?”

“Wh-what!”

Zel raised his eyes having heard Hajime’s objection. Shia and her tribe also looked at Hajime in reflex. Yue who understand what Hajime was thinking only keep a clarifying face.

“As I said, I can’t relate to your circumstance. If you want to take them from me, then you are trying to obstruct my way after all.”

Hajime who glared at the Elders, reach out his hand and put it on the crying Shia’s head. Having surprised by it, Shia look up at Hajime.

“If you want, to take them away from me… … I hope you’re prepared.”

“Hajime-san…”

What Hajime mean by that was he won’t forgive anyone who tried to obstruct him anymore than this. However, still, for the sake of Haulia tribe he won’t hesitate to wage war against Faea Belgaen, the stronghold of demi-humans, that resolution, was piercing into Shia whose heart already sank in despair.

“You are serious, right?”

Alfrerick looked at Hajime with sharp gaze that won’t permit any deceit.

“Obviously”

However, Hajime wasn’t shaken at all. His unyielding resolve can be seen. There is no respect for this world, those who obstructing doesn’t need to be compromised and pardoned. It was his decision that he made in the Abyss.

“Even if I say that there will be guide from Faea Belgaen?”

The execution of Haulia tribe was already decided in Elders Conference. Even more, it’ll will affect the country’s prestige to overturn it by yielding to the threat. Also in the future, the card of guiding can’t be used as bargaining chip because they might attack Hajime and his party because the Elders Conference’s decision can’t be overturned. Therefore, Alfrerick make the proposal. However, Hajime made it clear that there is no more room for negotiation.

“Don’t make me say it again. My guide is Haulia.”

“Tell me the reason, for you to stick to them. If you only wanted to go to the Great Tree then anyone can be your guide.”

To Alfrerick’s words, Hajime reveal that it’ll be troublesome, while Shia take a peek at him. From a while ago, Shia kept staring at Hajime and their eyes met for a moment. Then she felt her heart slightly throbbed. Even though their eyes met only for a moment, Shia pulse keep rising.

“I’ve promised to them. I’ll help them in exchange for their guide.”

“… … promise. If it was that don’t you think it was already fulfilled? Haven’t you protected them from the demonic beasts of the canyon and the empire’s Soldiers? Then, it’s only left with the reward to guide you. There won’t be any problem if the one who give the reward was different.”

“There is one big problem. I’ve promised to ensure their safety while guiding me. Just because there is better thing on the way, I can’t just tossed them aside and substitute them that’ll be…”

Hajime cut his words then look at Yue. Yue also looked at Hajime then slightly smile. Having told by Hajime, Alfrerick can only shrugged his shoulders while smiling wryly.

“Uncool right?”

Sneak attack, surprise attack, deceptive attack, cowardice, despicable lie, bluff. When killing each other, Hajime doesn’t think those were bad. In order to survive, it was necessary to do that.

However, because of that, other than killing each other he want to protect his honor. If that can’t be done truly he won’t be no more than a scum. Hajime is also a man. For the girl that he met in the Abyss he wanted to draw that line, to not show any disgraceful behaviour more than needed.

Maybe because he realized what Hajime was thinking, Alfrerick can only let out a deep sigh. The other Elders' face was looked to ask what should they do. For a while, silent wrap them, before long Alfrerick made a proposal with a tired face.

"Then, let make it that they are your slaves. In Faea Belgaen's law, those who gone outside the Sea of Trees and didn't come back, those who catched and made slave, was assumed to have died. Though there is a good chance we can win inside fog of the Sea of Trees, there are person who can use magic outside so we hardly has chance to win. Therefore, we considered they died so that no one come after them and expand the damage. … those who already considered to be dead won't be able to be executed!"

"Alfrerick! That is!"

It was a complete sophism. Naturally, the other Elders' expression turned into "gyo". Zel unintentionally leaned over then raised his protest.

"Zel. You should understand. What that boy shown and his power. If you execute the Haulia tribe then he'll be our enemy. In that case, how many will be sacrificed… … as one of Elders, we must avoided that kind of danger."

"However, what will it show (to the citizen)! If the rumour that we yield to power and let loose a monster child spread, then the Elders Conference's prestige will surely fall!"

"However…"

Other Elders also joined the discussion between Zel and Alfrerick, the place became full of commotion. As expected, having overlook and let loose the risk factor, then suddenly they can't punished them was not an easy thing. With the establishment of this bad precedence, the Elders Conference's prestige will take a fall and there'll be various speculation such as approval with ulterior motives.

However, inside that (discussion), Hajime made a remark without reading the mood.

"Aah~, even though it's bad to say it now, isn't it too late that you realized that you're not only overlooking Shia?"

Having heard Hajime's words, their discussion stopped, then the Elders glance at Hajime asking what he mean by that.

Hajime slowly turned over his right arm's sleeve then he did direct magic manipulation. By doing so, red lines appear on his right arm's skin. In addition, spark come off from his right hand that use "Lightning-clad".

The Elders' eyes were opened wide. Because the magic was invoked without chant and magic circle made them startled. They only thought that he was able to defeat Jin because his artificial arm was an artifact.

"I am also the same as Shia who can directly manipulate magic and use unique magic. Next is Yue. She is the one whom you call a monster. However, aren't your tradition said "whatever

that person is, don't be hostile to them"? According to your law, you must overlook these monsters. Well it's already too late for Shia though."

Although the Elders was stunned for a while, before long they began to whisper to each other. Because it looks like they've come into conclusion, represented by Alfrerick, he began to report the result of Elders Conference with a big sigh.

"Haa~, Haulia tribe's taboo child, Shia Haulia, was regarded as relative to Nagumo Hajime who is also a taboo child. Therefore, because Nagumo Hajime passed the qualification we won't be hostile to them, but they are forbidden from entering Faea Belgaen and its surrounding villages. Followed by if someone tried to lay their hand on Nagumo Hajime's family then everything will be their own responsibility… … over. Are there anything else?"

"Well, whatever it is as long as I can reach the Great Tree is okay. These guys were my guides, There are no problem"

"… … I see. Then, hurry and leave. Although it hurt our heart to be unable to welcome someone who passed the qualification as stated in our tradition that finally came…"

"Don't mind it. There is no need to say everything because there will be lot of absurd remarks that I hear. Even so, to have such rational judgement I can only be thankful about it."

To Hajime's words, Alfrerick can only smile wryly. The other Elders have bitter and tired expressions. Rather than bitterness and grudge, Quickly go away! was what they had in mind. Having seen that, Hajime shrugged his shoulders then urged Yue, Shia, and her tribe to stood up.

Even though Yue was expressionless from the beginning till the end, having heard their talk she didn't say anything and only stood up to match Hajime.

However, Shia and the Haulia tribe still didn't believe it was reality and there is no sign of them standing up in their stunned state. Even though they are prepared to die until a while ago, then strangely in the end it suddenly turn into banishment. "Eh, is it okay for us to leave like this?" that's the kind of feeling that rolled in their mind.

"Oi, when will you stoppdaydreaming? We must quickly go."

Having heard Hajime's words, they finally start to stand up in hurry, then Shia and her tribe follow Hajime who was quickly going outside. Alfrerick and the other Elders send them till the gate.

Shia asked Hajime while flustered.

"U-um, is it okay… for us to stay alive?"

"? Didn't you hear the talk a while ago?"

"W-well, even though I heard it… … that is, somehow it doesn't seems to be real to be able to go out of that kind of predicament suddenly… … it makes me feel it was an unbelievable situation…"

Her perplexed expression also shared by the surrounding Haulia tribe. That was because for demi-humans, the decision of Elders Conference is absolute. Yue then talk to Shia who is perplexed that she can't understand how to process that.

"… … it's okay to honestly rejoice about it"

"Yue-san?"

"… … Hajime saved you. That's the truth. It's okay to just accept and rejoice."

"… …"

Having heard Yue's words, Shia glances at Hajime who quietly walks next to her. Hajime then shrugs while facing forward.

"Well, it was a promise."

"Uh… …"

Shia shoulder was trembling. In exchange to guide inside the Sea of Trees, Shia and her tribe were protected. It was the promise that Shia desperately attached to Hajime. Originally, using "Foresight" she saw the future where Hajime protected her family. However, that future wasn't absolute. Depending on Shia's choice of actions, it can change a lot. Because of that, Shia was "desperately" trying to obtain Hajime's cooperation. The other party was humans who discriminate against demi-human, and Shia didn't have any fortune to offer. Her negotiation materials were only herself as "woman" and "special ability". Even so, when it was easily discarded, she almost cried without knowing what else to do.

Even so, she somehow able to get his promise, and while talking on their way she felt that if it was Hajime then he'll kept it, that kind feeling. That maybe because even though she was a demi-human, she didn't felt any discriminatory glance. However, it was something she felt "somehow", it was not something for certain. That's why because she lose to her anxiousness, he said to the "one who promised to protect" that "even though the enemies were humans". In fact, when he fight those empire's Soldiers without any hesitation, it made her so relieved.

However, this time even Shia thought that even if it was Hajime, it wasn't the same as with those empire's Soldiers. It can be said it was the same as declaring war in front of the emperor. And the promise was protected without even flinching. Although, even if it was for Hajime himself, as Yue has said, Shia and her precious family were certainly protected.

Since a while ago, her heart kept throbbing hard. Her face was hot, a mysterious impulse that kept jumping up and down as if something stuck in her throat. Is it the joy because of her family's safety or…

Shia tried to follow Yue's advice to honestly be happy and left her current feeling then entrusted everything to her impulse to make the best of it. That is, she clings to Hajime with full force!

"Hajime-sa~n! Thank you very much~!"

“Uwaa!? What’s so sudden!?”

“Mu…”

I absolutely won’t be separated even if the bruise will make me cry! that’s what Shia said while pressing her face into Hajime’s shoulder then starting to rub it. Her expression started to loosen and her cheeks were dyed in pink.

Yue who saw that was groaning in bad mood, when she think about doing something, she only hold Hajime’s hand, nothing special was done.

Having seen Shia explode in joy to Hajime, the Haulia tribe finally understood that they escaped with their life, they started to share the joy to each other.

The Elders can only see them with complex expression. Also, there are many who avert their gaze of hatred and discomfort.

Hajime while understand what was happened, can only smile wryly because for a while he was rolled into a troublesome thing.

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Chapter 5 : The Only Way to Survive

“Well then, I think I’ll give you some combat training”

Hajime and his party who banished from Faea Belgaen were resting in their temporary base near the Great Tree when he suddenly said that. Even though it was called a base, it was only a barrier made of Faea Drain crystals that… Hajime nonchalantly stole. Inside it while sitting on stumps, those rabbit-ears floated dazed expressions.

“Th-that… Hajime-san. Combat training in other words…”

Shia asked him on behalf of her perplexed clan.

“Just like the words said. Anyway, we can’t reach the Great Tree before ten days passed, right? Then it’s better to effectively use those time, I am thinking to make you whom weak, fragile, and loser nature deeply ingrained in, into someone who excel in combat.”

“Wh-why did you think that…”

The rabbit-ears were trembling from the intimidating feeling that can be felt from Hajime’s eyes and whole body. Shia naturally doubt Hajime’s abrupt declaration.

“Why? Did you ask why? Shameless rabbit.”

“Au, you still not called me by name…”

Hajime with skeptical eyes explain to the depressed Shia.

“Listen well. The promise that I had with you guys was only to protect you until you done guiding me. Then, what will you do after guiding me, did you already think about it?”

Haulia tribe’s members look at each other then shake their heads. Kam also has a hard expression. Even though they vaguely felt the uneasiness, it seems because they were in upheaval after upheaval that thought was thrown into the corner of their minds. Or it was possible that they didn’t think about it at all.

“Well, it looks like you didn’t think about it at all. No one told me you’ve think about it after all. You’re weak, so you can only run and hide in front of malice and possibility of injury. To that kind of you, the place to retreat called Faea Belgaen was lost. In other words, when my protection is gone, you’ll once more fall into predicament.”

“”””””””””… …”””””””””

Because that was right, everyone of Haulia tribe look down with dark expression. Meanwhile, they can Hear Hajime said.

“You didn’t have any way out. There is no protection nor place to hide. However, demonic beasts and humans will aimed at the weak you without mercy. If this going on there will be only path of annihilation… are you okay with that? Are you okay with weakness as the reason of your ruin? Is it okay for the lives that you luckily got back uselessly gone? What do you think?”

No one utter any words and gloomy atmosphere filled their vicinity. Until someone suddenly said.

“There no way I can accept that.”

Haulia tribe began to look up having touched by those words. Shia was already look resolute.

“That’s right. That can’t be accepted. Then, what should you do. The answer is easy. Just become strong. Just attack all the trouble that come and destroy it, you only need to acquire your rights with your own hands.”

“… … but, we are RabbitMan tribe. We didn’t have strong body such as Tigerman tribe and Bearman tribe neither special skill like Wingedman tribe and Earthman tribe… … we are totally, that…”

Because it was a common sense that RabbitMan tribe is weak, Hajime’s words only give birth to negative feelings. Because they are weak, they can’t fight. No matter how much they struggle to get strong as Hajime said, that’s what they think.

Seeing this Haulia tribe Hajime laugh from his nose.

“Did you know I was called “incompetent” by my former companions?””

“Eh?”

“”Incompetent” you hear, “incompetent”. My status and skill was as ordinary as average person. The weakest among my companions. Nothing more than a burden in combat. Therefore, I was called “incompetent” by my former companions. Indeed, that was the truth.”

All of Haulia tribe members were surprised by Hajime’s confession. They can’t believe that Hajime who was able to easily defeat Raisen Grand Canyon’s brutal demonic beasts and Elder of Bearman tribe who excel in combat was someone “incompetent” and “weakest”.

“However, I who was fallen into the bottom of the Abyss acted to become strong. I didn’t think if something was possible or impossible to do. If I didn’t do anything then I’d die, that’s why I fought with all my might in that crisis. … … when I noticed I was already became this.”

All of it was talked indifferently, however, all of Haulia tribe members can feel chill running through their whole body because of the sublime content. With status the same as average person means his specs is even lower than RabbitMan tribe. In that situation, he was able to defeat monsters that even stronger than demonic beasts in Raisen Grand Canyon that they can’t even match again. His abilities and the fact that he survived even though he was the weakest after challenging those monsters make the Haulia tribe tremble in fear imagining those bizarre situations. If it was them they’ll be crushed in despair and accept death in resignation. Just like how the accept the decision from the Elders Conference.

“Your situation now is similar to mine. Now promised to yourself, let’s break the despair into pieces. I don’t care even if you think it was impossible for you. You’ll only be annihilated next time. After all, I won’t help you after the promise is accomplished. It’s okay to spend the little time remained in your life to lick each other wound just like losers.”

Then, what will you do? is what Hajime asked with his eyes. There is no immediate answer from Haulia tribe members. Well, it can be said there is no other answers. They understood there is no other road to survive except to become strong. It’s not like Hajime protect their family out of justice. Therefore, he will surely abandon them after their promise is fulfilled. However, even if they understand that, their nature is peaceful and gentle, the RabbitMan tribe’s gentleness is stronger than anyone else, that’s why for them Hajime’s proposal is the same as stepping into an unknown territory. It was difficult for them to change their way of life unless they fall into the exact situation just like Hajime.

Haulia tribe fall into silent and look at each other. However, Shia who since a while ago floated a resolute expression look at them with a skeptical gaze then she stand up.

“I’ll do it. Please teach me how to fight! I don’t want to stay weak anymore!”

Her shout echoes all over the Sea of Trees. A declaration to say there is no need to think more than this. Shia hates fighting. It was scary and painful, above all it was sad to hurt and to be hurt. However, it was the truth that she was the cause in driving her tribe into current predicament, so she absolutely won’t let her tribe perish. For that certain purpose, Shia wanted to become stronger even if it was against the nature of RabbitMan tribe.

Shia with unyielding determination in her eyes look straight at Hajime. Kam and his tribe who are dumbfounded by that, gradually change their expression into resolute one, one by one they stand up. In the end, not just the male, female and children of Haulia tribe all stood up and Kam who represent them move a step forward.

“Hajime-dono… … please teach us.”

His words was few. However, there is a will inside of it. The will to fight against injustice that’ll come to attack them.

“Okay. Are you prepared? How much stronger you become will be up to your determination. I am only here to give a hand to it. Also, I won’t be gentle to those who decided to drop out on the way. We only have ten days in addition… … be accustomed to dying. What await you were only life or death after all.”

Having heard Hajime’s word, all of Haulia tribe members nodded with determination.

* * *

Before he start to train Haulia tribe, Hajime took out equipments that will be used to train from

“treasure box” and hand it to them. It was the single-edged knife that similar to a type of Japanese sword called kodachi that he passed to them before. Hajime made those blade with precision that even the sharpness is excellent because he practiced the method to manufacture the ultra thin blade. It was strong against impact because it made of Taur ore. It takes pride in its durability despite its thinness.

After he gave them those weapons, he taught them basic movements. Of course Hajime didn’t have any knowledge in martial arts. But it was not something he got from manga or game. The things he taught was only “logical movements” that he gain and polish by fighting the demonic beasts in the Abyss. While doing so, he pile up real combat experience against types of demonic beasts. Haulia tribe strong points was their search ability and stealth ability. In conclusion, he think it’s better for their group strategies that specialize in co-operation and surprise attacks.

By the way, Shia is exclusively trained by Yue about magic. That was because she can use magic even though she is a demi-human, Shia also able to use direct magic manipulation so she should be able to use magic without chant or magic circle as long as she has the knowledge for it. Occasionally, Shia’s scream can be heard from the other side of fog but it seems the training is going well.

However, something happen on the second day of training. Hajime looks irritated with veins appear on his head while supervising Haulia tribe’s training. Certainly, Haulia tribe members who go against their nature were taking the training seriously. Even they somewhat manage to defeat demonic beasts without receiving much wounds.

However…

Gusagh(Thunk)!

One of the demonic beasts were dead pierced by Hajime's specialized kodachi.

"Aah, please forgive the sinful me~"

The one that said that while clinging to the demonic beast was a man of Haulia tribe. It's as if he is killing his best friend who he know for a long time.

Bushu(Foosh)!

Another demonic beast was defeated with a slash.

"I am sorry! I am sorry! Even so I must do it~"

A kodachi which gripped by both hand cut off the neck, while the woman who did it tremble. It's like the result of a mad love, a woman who killed her loved one.

Bakikh!

To the dying demonic beast, it used the last of its power to attack. Kam who who blown off by the body blow was muttering in self-ridicule while falling.

"Huh, is this the punishment for me who brandish the sword… … it was the natural result after all…"

Having heard those words, the surrounding Haulia tribe were starting to tear up, then they shout to Kam in bitter expression.

"Chief! Please don't say that! The sinful ones are all of us!"

"That's right! Even if the time of judgment will come, but that's not now! Please stand up! Chief!"

"We don't have any road to return any more. That's why Chief, let's advance together until death."

"Y-you guys… … that's right. I can't fall down in place like this. For the sake of his death (small demonic beast which look like a mouse), we will advance through the death!"

"""""""""""""Chief!"""""""""""""

Good atmosphere surround Kam and his tribe. Hajime who can't endure it anymore cut in.

"Aghhh—! It noisy, stupid! Why the heck are you exaggerating every time you kill one demonic beast! What for? Seriously what was that for? That cheap play! What was that dramatic feeling? Just kill it in silent! Just kill it instantly! Don't call demonic beast "he"! That's gross!"

That's, even though he knew that Haulia tribe members are working hard, but because of their nature, every time they kill a demonic beast they make an unknown drama. This is the

second day, having seen those spectacles for many times, Hajime already pointed this out many times, slowly, he run out of patience.

To Hajime who was angered, probably because he tried to contain his voice his body twitch and shake after “Even if you say that…” or “Even if they are demonic beasts, they are pitiful…” heard that mutter from the Haulia tribe members.

In addition a lot of vein appeared on his head.

One boy from Haulia tribe can’t stand it anymore then tried to approach and calm Hajime. This boy was the one who Hajime helped by the hair-breadth from the Hyveria in Raisen Grand Canyon, seems to especially attached to him.

However, while the boy who advance while trying to say something to Hajime, suddenly, he jumped back.

Hajime who was dumbfounded by it asked the boy.

“? What happen?”

The boy answered Hajime while quietly crawling using both his hands.

“Ah, yes. I almost step on Flower-san… thank goodness. If I didn’t noticed it, it’d be crushed. Because it was so beautiful, it’ll be too pitiful to step on it.”

Hajime’s cheeks were convulsing.

“F-flower-san?”

“Un! Hajime-niichan! I really like Flower-san! Because there are lot of Flower-san around here, it was terrible if we crushed it while training~”

Rabbit-eared boy smiled with a bright smile. The surrounding Haulia tribe members also look at this boy with smile.

Hajime slowly made his face look down. Hajime’s gray hair fall down and concealed his expression. Then, suddenly he answer with whisper-like voice.

“… … sometimes, while moving you jumped in strange timing… Is it because of that Flower-san?”

As Hajime said, during the training, Haulia tribe sometime change their pace according to strange timing, that kind of movement. Although it was in his mind, because it connected with their next action, it looked like they tried to find easier position for them to kill in his eyes.

“No no, that can’t be. There is no such a thing.”

“Haha, that’s right, right?”

Hajime start to loosen his said having heard what Kam said with a wry smile. However…

“Yes, not only just flowers, we also take notice of insects. When we have to move suddenly in hurry, we manage to avoid them somehow.”

Having heard Kam’s words, Hajime expression start to fall. Hajime began to sway as if he was a ghost, while Haulia tribe members thinking something bad was said looked at each other in uneasiness. Hajime slowly approach the boy, then he suddenly reveal a smile while the boy also keep his smile.

And then Hajime… … with a smile step and crushed the flower. Politely, after step on it, he grind it with his foot.

The boy who saw it was dumbfounded. Finally Hajime remove his foot, what left is the remains of “Flower-san” that lay tragically after such cruelty.

“F-flower-sa~n!”

The boy’s sorrowful voice echoes inside the Sea of Trees. “What are you doing!” is what the Haulia tribe members’ surprised expression tell while looking at Hajime, then Hajime turn to look at them with a smile along with veins on his head.

“Aah, I finally understand. I finally fi~nally understand. I was too soft. It was my responsibility. It was my mistake to have hope for your tribe. Haha, I can’t believe even in life and death situation you still pay attention to “Flower-san” and “Insects”… … combat skills or real combat experiences is not your main problem. I should have noticed it faster. I am angry at my inexperience… … FUFUFU(HUHUHU)”

“Ha-Hajime-dono?”

After Hajime began to ominously laugh, Kam timidly asked him. And his answer is…

DOPANn!

Gunshot from Donner. Kam was blown off to the back face-up, after flailing a little in the air he fall into the ground. Next, the non-lethal rubber bullet that used to attack, dropped to the ground from Kam’s forehead.

In their vicinity wind blows “fooosh”, while silence rule the place. Hajime then approach Kam who was fainted with his eyes turned white, this time he aimed then shot the rubber bullet at Kam’s belly.

“Hauu!”

Kam who wake up with a scream along some fit of cough looked at Hajime with tearful eyes. Despite the surreal spectacle of seeing teary eyed bearded rabbit-eared old man sitting in woman-like, Hajime declared.

“You dirty “piip”. From this moment, you “piip” must kill those demonic beasts as if you’re going to die! In the future, don’t even notice the flowers or insects! Or else I am going to “piip” you up! If you understand, hunt those demonic beasts now! This “piip”!”

Haulia tribe was stiffen by Hajime’s vulgar speech. And to them, Hajime fired without mercy.

DOPANn! DOPANn! DOPANn! DOPANn! DOPANn! DOPANn! DOPANn! DOPANn! DOPANn! DOPANn! DOPANn! DOPANn! DOPANn!

Haulia tribe scattered into the Sea of Trees just like spider’s childrens while screaming. The boy desperately cling to Hajime while trembling.

“Hajime-niichan! What happened!? Why did you do this!?”

Hajime glared at the boy who stare at him with sparkling eyes, then look at the surrounding and confirmed flowers were blooming here and there. Until finally, he silently fire again.

One after another the flowers were scattered. The boy is screaming.

“Why~, just why~, please stop Hajime-niichan!”

“Shut up, shitty brat. Did you know? Everytime you talk uselessly I will dispersed the surrounding flowers. If you pay attention to the flowers, it’ll be dispersed. Even if you not doing anything, I’ll dispersed it. If you don’t want that, go kill a lot of demonic beasts!”

Having said so, Hajime start to shot the flowers again. The boy’s cried then disappeared into the Sea of Trees.

After that, inside the Sea of Trees “piip” can continue be heard in Haulia members’ scream and cry(roar).

It was the training method to alter the character of RabbitMan tribe who was not good in combat by nature. Even combat skills and spirit can be altered using this method, it can be said similar to He***man method from earth…

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Chapter 6 : Shia, Grand Battle of One’s Lifetime

ZUGANn! DOGHA! BAKI BAKI BAKI! DOGUSHA!

Tremendous sounds of destruction could be heard inside the Sea of Trees. Some trees could be witnessed, broken in two. There were craters scattered here and there that can be seen on

the surface as if meteors fell into it. Furthermore some trees are burning while some are frozen.

The cause of such devastation against nature are two girls. Even now, the destruction is still ongoing.

“Deeyaaaa(Take this)!!”

A tree with a diameter of one meter was shot out along with the ear-splitting yell. It broke in the middle and flew into the target with great speed. With definite mass and speed. A brutal power of destruction was given to the rather mundane tree, carrying devastation across its wake.

“… … “Scarlet Spear””

It was a spear of flame that burns its target and everything in front of it into ash. Even objects with huge mass will be burned if touched by it. It countered the log that moves like a cannonball and turned it into ashes fluttering in the air.

“Not yet!”

The shockwave created by the collision between the thrown “Scarlet Spear” and log, dispersed the fog, and on the other side of the fog, a running silhouette could be seen. Immediately, a log falls from the sky like a meteor and pierces the ground with a sound of thunder. Backstepping, its target escapes from the range of the shock wave then once again the spear of flame was released.

However, the silhouette rushed out from the fog in high speed and then a strong flying kick attacked the log that pierced the ground. It’s unknown where the power came from but the log that received the kick was explosively smashed, and from it came splinters that shot at the target.

“kh! “Fire Castle””

Suddenly a wall of flame that can be called a rampart came out to block the improvised shots that come flying, not even one shot was able to reach its target.

However…

“Got youu!”

“Kh!”

At that time the silhouette already moved behind her. After shooting the improvised shots that acted as a splendid distraction, she once again slips into the fog. Her hand grasped the hammer that could be called ultraweight class, immediately, a powerful wind descended.

“”Wind Wall””

A fierce impact from the Sledge Hammer struck the ground and crushed it. From the impact, stones were shot out and scattered in every direction. However, her target was able to block that terrific attack, and scattered it using the blowing wind coming from the wind barrier, because it immediately retreated into the safe area. In addition, after activating this skill, the target fired another magic without mercy at the other party that is a goner, because of post-skill rigidity.

“”Frozen Coffin””

“Fue! W-wa-!”

When she noticed her target’s magic, she desperately cried out for it to stop, but there is no need to hear that, because the law of no-talking-is-necessary was in place. The attacker tried to get away from her location but the ice magic instantly started to freeze her feet… … and resulted in her whole body turning into a chunk of ice, except the head.

“Co-cold~, please hurry release it~, Yue-sa~n”

“… … My victory”

That’s right, the two who kept fighting without any discussion were Yue and Shia. Today was the start of their tenth day’s training, a mock combat as the final test. The rule was that it’ll be Shia’s victory if she was able to damage Yue even a little. The result…

“Uu~, that is~, eh, that! Yue-san’s cheek! There is a scratch! A scratch! My attack hit! Ahaha~, I did it! It’s my win!”

Certainly, there is a small scratch on Yue’s cheek. Probably it came from a piece of rocky debris that broke through Yue’s defense. Even though it was a really small scratch, a wound is a wound. It was Shia’s victory. After pointing that out, Shia’s face looked overjoyed by it. She revealed a big smile, although her body was cold and her nose was running. Her rabbit ears twitched happily. No wonder, there is an important promise she made with Yue in this training graduation’s battle after all.

Also, for Yue, that promise is not something amusing. Therefore,

“… … there is no wound”

It was a good thing that the wound disappeared immediately because of “Auto Regen”. She sulkily turn her head with a hmpf.

“W-wa-!? It’s unfair! Certainly the scratch… … no, even though there is nothing now! There certainly was! It’s cruel to cheat! Now that I said it, please remove the magic already~. It’s been cold since a while ago… … huh, somehow I’m becoming sleepy…”

From the cold and runny nose, Shia begins to doze off. You’ll die if you sleep! That’s her current situation. Yue, who was peeking at that appearance let out a deep sigh while thinking it must not be continued in her heart, removed her magic.

“Pikchi-! Pikchi! Auu, it’s co~ld. I almost became a rabbit that can’t return (to life)”

After a lovely sneeze, she covers her nose with a nearby leaf. Shia then looked at Yue with seriousness in her eyes. Yue made an unpleasant expression because of her gaze. Her expressionlessness collapsed because of that unpleasant expression.

“Yue-san. I’ve won.”

“… … … … … … Nn.”

“It is a promise, right?”

“… … … … … … … … Nn.”

“If, I can win at least once in the ten days… … I’ll be taken along on Hajime-san and Yue-san’s travels, right?”

“… … … … … … … … … … Nn.”

“At the very least, you’ll help to convince Hajime-san, right?”

“… … … … … … … … … … Today’s breakfast, what is it?”

“Waiiit! What’s with sudden change of topic! Moreover, it was light! Yue-san, aren’t you okay as long as there is Hajime-san’s blood! What’s with you asking about breakfast! Please be my ally already! If I have Yue-san as an ally, it’s already 90% OK”

Shia makes gya- gya- noises, Yue looked at that expression that came from the bottom of her heart.

As Shia said, Yue had promised her. That is, Yue said to Shia, only if she was able to damage her in the mock combat even with a small injury within ten days. If she did it, Yue must acknowledge and allow Shia to travel along with her and Hajime. Also, Yue must help Shia persuade Hajime when she asks him.

Shia seriously wanted to come along with Hajime and Yue. Half of it because she didn’t want to become a burden to her family, while the other half simply because she wanted to be together with Hajime and Yue, and to get along with the two.

However, her wish was refused coldly. Even now that can be seen from Hajime and Yue’s attitude. At that time, what Shia thought of was the promise from before.

In Shia’s eyes, Hajime somehow pampered Yue by fulfilling her expectations. Above all, Shia is a woman. She understood Yue’s feelings toward Hajime. Naturally it was because she also has the same feelings. So, the reverse is also true. Yue also understood Shia’s feelings. That’s why, first of all it was necessary to make Yue acknowledge Shia Haulia’s existence.

It’s not like Shia wanted to take Hajime from Yue. She didn’t think about that at all. What she wanted from Hajime was to acknowledge her existence just like Yue, even a little. That was probably because of the world’s influence that made them the “same”. In other words, she only wanted to be “friends” with them. So that there’ll be someone she love and a friend who also love that person by her side. That’s the kind of future that Shia dreamt of.

On the other hand, about why Yue exchanged that promise to Shia, even though there were no merits in it for Yue. 20% of it was because she felt sympathy to her. When she heard Shia's story for the first time inside the Raisen Grand Canyon, even though she developed complex feelings because her circumstances were comparatively better than her own, somewhere in her heart she can't deny the feeling that they are the "same" that sprung up. Because she thinks of her as a comrade even if a little, she "pampered" Shia.

The other 80% was… … woman's obstinacy. Yue was able to grasp Shia's promise. That is,

"Please see it for yourself if I'll just be a burden. Even if it's impossible, please notice that I'm able to be beside Hajime".

It was a challenge to fight over the man she loves. She didn't think such a woman could exist near her. However, when she thought Shia who was the "same" as her as an opponent, along with Shia's enthusiastic appearance and terrific concentration, in the depths of her heart she thought it was impossible to keep silent.

As a result, the match of promise was won by Shia.

"… … haa. I understand. I'll defend the promise…"

"Really!? As expected, the~re is no need to stop~! Please defend it well!"

"… … … … … … … …Nn"

"Somehow, I think there was a strange pause… Will you really take care of it?"

"… … persistent"

Reluctantly, tru~ly with reluctant feelings, Yue admitted Shia's victory. Shia was a little uneasy about Yue's answer but left it behind and continued with expressions of relief and joy, because she knew that Yue was the same as Hajime in the fact that she won't abandon her promises.

Slowly, the training of Haulia tribe by Hajime came to an end. The gloomy Yue and cheerful Shia were returning to Hajime and the others.

* * *

When Yue and Shia arrived at the place Hajime was at, Hajime had his eyes closed, and arms crossed while leaning on the nearby tree.

Maybe because he noticed the two's presence, Hajime slowly opened his eyes and turned to them. While dubiously looking at the two with completely opposite moods, he raised one hand and called out to them.

"Yo, both of you. Did the match end?"

Hajime had heard there was a bet between the two for the match. Hajime was the one who prepared Shia's ultraweight Sledgehammer. The Shia who, with an eager expression wanted

to defeat Yue, and asked him for a new weapon still fresh in his memory, because Yue herself didn't object to it. Although the contents of the bet weren't known and they wouldn't tell him anyway, also because it wouldn't be a disadvantage for Yue, he made it.

Actually, Hajime thought, if Yue and Shia fought 8-9 out of 10 cases would end up with Yue's victory. He already understood Yue's ability in the Abyss. No matter if Shia was able to directly use magic, she who was immersed in peace until now is different from them.

However, from their expressions, Hajime was internally surprised that his expectations were overthrown. Shia cheerfully talked to Hajime.

"Hajime-san! Hajime-san! Please hear me out! I, was finally able to win against Yue! It's a big victory! Well~, I want to show it to Hajime-san~, my magnificent fight! The time when Yue-san admits def-hebu!?"

Shia tried to explain how their match settled with gestures. But because she got too into it, Yue's jumping slap came and with a "dosha" she was blown away, and crashed into the ground while spinning. It was so strong that she could only twitch without any signs of getting up.

Yue turned around with hmpf in a bad mood, then Hajime asked her in a wry smile.

"Well? What happened?"

Rather than the match's result, Hajime was asking about the content. Honestly, the fact that Yue was defeated is not something he can believe easily. No matter who looked at Yue and Shia, without knowing what had happened, would only think that it was a lie.

Yue who exude the aura that she doesn't want to talk about it didn't want to hide it, reluctantly she answered Hajime's question.

"… … her magic aptitude is steady like Hajime"

"That's good, or else it'll be waste of a treasure… … then? That's not all, right? To be pestered by a Sledgehammer of that level…"

"… … nn, she specializes in body strengthening. Honestly, it was at level of a monster"

"… … hee. Is that compared to us?"

Hajime narrowed his eyes to Yue's evaluation. Honestly, the high evaluation was more than he imagined. Strangely, her expressionlessness was destroyed changing into bitterness while talking about it, these were the things he noticed. Yue could be seen thinking of how to answer Hajime's question, and then she replied while looking into his eyes.

"… … compared to normal Hajime… … around 60%"

"Seriously… … is that the maximum?"

"Nn… … but, there are rooms for improvement, probably"

“Ooo. That’s certainly at the level of a monster”

Hajime was secretly surprised at having heard Yue talk about Shia’s monster-like power, then he looked at Shia without saying anything. If it’s said around 60% of Hajime without any strengthening, Shia’s strengthened status should be around 6000. It was around twice as much as a truly strengthened hero. Truly a power worthy of being considered “monster level”. It can be said she was capable of reaching Yue. It really was something unimaginable from her usual sobbing and whimpering appearance.

Shia noticed Hajime’s half-astonished half-amazed gaze. She cheerfully stood up, then walked up to Hajime with a serious expression while desperately controlling her hurried mind. Straightening her posture, her gray hair with a blue hue was fluttering and her rabbit ear stood up straight. From now on she’ll express her once in a lifetime request. Well… … it can also be called a confession. Her body trembled in nervousness, even though her expression stiffened, there is an unyielding spirit in her eyes, step by step, she advanced. Finally, she firmly matched her gaze with Hajime’s, then spoke her wish.

“Hajime-san. Please take me along on your travels. Please!”

“I refuse”

“An immediate answer!?”

Shia who didn’t think she’d be refused because of the mood right now, opened her eyes wide with a look of astonishment. “What is she saying all of a sudden?” was the thing that could be seen from Hajime’s eyes while he watched Shia as if watching a shameless person.

Shia was indignant. It’s okay to struggle some more! Something like that.

“Ho-how cruel, Hajime-san. Even though I was seriously asking that, to easily…”

“Well, though I don’t want to know even if you said it. First of all, what about Kam and the others? Don’t tell me, you aren’t trying to take them along, right?”

“Th-that’s wrong! It was my own story just now! I already talked before to father and the others. Even though it’s not like they think I was a burden… … that’s… …”

“That’s? What is it?”

Somehow Shia started to become bashful. While upwardly peeking at Hajime and playing around with the tip of her fingers. A sly, cunning gesture. Hajime was suspiciously looking at Shia.

At their side, Yue looked irritated while staring at Shia.

“That’s… … I, I just wanted to follow what I thought of…”

“Haa? What are you trying to follow? If it’s now, you won’t be burden to your tribe, right? If you have that power then generally, there shouldn’t be anyone you can’t beat”

"… …"

Shia who bashfully tried to answer made Hajime reach his limit of patience, he then pulled out Donner. It wasn't known whether she noticed that but Shia yelled "Woman's courage!" in her mind then voiced out her desire.

"I want to stay beside Hajime-san! I love you!"

"… … Ha?"

I've said it, now I only need to bite it! Was what Shia thought while panicking, in front of her, Hajime looked dumbfounded as if he was a pigeon that ate a toy bullet. Exactly the appearance of someone who didn't understand what happened. However, after a while, as if the meaning finally transmitted into his brain, he instinctively blurted out a remark (or tsukkomi).

"Nonono, isn't that weird? Where the hell did I raise the flag? Even though I can't say for myself, I thought I treated you harshly… … don't tell me, did you get off from that?"

Shia never thought he would think of her like that and started to back away one step with regret from Hajime. Then Shia fiercely protested.

"Who's a pervert! I don't have that kind of hobby! Rather, if you noticed that I was treated harshly, why don't you be a little nicer…"

"Well, there is no need for me to be nicer to you… … first of all, are you seriously in love with me? Aren't you just tempted by the circumstances?"

The reason for Hajime not believing Shia's goodwill is because he thought it was just a suspension bridge effect. It wasn't a surprise because everyone could see Hajime's attitude toward Shia was harsh in every aspect. However, Shia who had her feelings doubted was very ill-humored.

"It was not related to the circumstance at all. No matter how many times you saved me from predicament, my constitution won't change… … even though I was glad at that time when you protected your promise in front of the Elders… … that may have affected me, but this feeling's already born so how can I do anything about this. Even I sometimes think about it. Something like "why it was this person". Hajime-san even now never calls me by my name, somehow it suddenly hit me and it hurts, just like a demon, answering only what's needed, always throwing himself into a crowd of demonic beasts, has no mercy, just like a demon, is never nice to me, only favoring Yue-san, just like a demon… … huh? Really, why am I in with love you? Huh~?"

While speaking, Shia began to doubt her own feelings. Shia inclines her neck and Hajime has veins popping out of his head, while barely being able to resist pulling out Donner unintentionally by mistake, while hearing her answer.

"A-anyway. I can't let you come along no matter what you feel"

"That's! That was a joke just now? I truly love you so please take me along!"

“You know, your feelings are… … well, even if they are real, don’t you understand that I already have Yue? Rather, to be able to say that confession in front of her… … even I thought about it a while ago, your number one weapon was your body strengthening, but that’s not it, right? I think it was your heart that’s completely made of Azanthium”

“Who’s the one with the heart made from the ore with the greatest hardness! Uu~, it’s become like this as expected… … ee, I understand. Everything about Hajime-san. It was as tricky as I thought”

Suddenly, Shia “fufufu” laughed suspiciously while turning toward Hajime.

“Because I thought this might happen! I’ve gained an ally while risking my life! Now, Yue-sensei! Please help me!”

“Ha? Yue?”

Hajime blinked his eyes having heard an unexpected name. Gotcha!, that’s the smug expression of Shia, then she glanced at Yue by their side.

Yue’s expression was so bitter as if she bit 100 insects at once, then genuinely unwillingly told Hajime.

“… … … … … … … … … … … … … … … Hajime, let’s take her along”

“Nonono, what’s with that interval. You obviously hate it… … don’t tell me it was the winning bet…”

“… … Regrettably”

Hajime roughly understood the circumstance from Yue who dropped her shoulders, he no longer felt anger but amazement. Surely, Shia was thinking, for Hajime to hear out her wish, her power truly isn’t enough. Once again, she remembered how Hajime took Yue’s words as a priority in decision making. Therefore, she needed a method to make Yue her ally. It was not an exaggeration to call it “a life risking” method, because she understood it’d otherwise be impossible considering she somewhat knew how Yue feels. In these ten days, it can be said she was literally dying to find out Yue’s habits (in training/combat). In other words, that’s just how serious Shia thought about it.

Hajime was scratching his head. Even if he saw how Yue was reluctantly admitting her, there’s no reason for him to take Shia along. In the end, it was a matter of Hajime’s feelings.

Yue was shrugging her shoulder as if saying that it can’t be helped. It was because in these ten days she, more than anyone had watched how Shia worked hard and how she destroyed the trouble that imposed her, so Yue allowed her to be a travel companion. In the beginning, she never felt hatred toward Shia or her feelings toward Hajime.

On the other side, Shia who asked Yue for help with a triumphant expression started to feel unease but she steeled herself. It was because Shia already tried everything she could, so she could only wait for her fate to play out.

Hajime inhaled and exhaled deeply once and looked straight into Shia's eyes, then he spun the words of confirmation one by one. Shia quietly regained her power when he heard his words.

"To go with us, don't you already know the answer?"

"Didn't you know? Isn't the future not an absolute thing?"

Shia said that because she was able to catch a glimpse of the future. She believes that the future can be changed by actions and resolution.

"It's a journey full of danger"

"I'm glad I am a monster. Thanks to that I can go with you."

That was the derogatory term from the Elders. However, she takes pride in it now. After all, she learned that there are things she wouldn't be capable of unless she was a monster.

"My wish is to get back to my hometown (original world). You'll likely never meet your family again, you know?"

"I have talked about that. "Nevertheless". Father and the others understand"

They are family that always protected her until now. There is no word that can express her gratitude. A family that's always together no matter where they are, when she told them her feelings, they will surely smile without any need of words.

"My hometown isn't somewhere you can easily live in"

"I'll say it no matter what. "Nevertheless""

Shia has shown her feelings. It won't stop with just that "word". It can't be stopped. That's the kind of feeling this was.

"… …"

"Fufu, is that the end? Then, it's my victory, right?"

"What victory…"

"It was my feelings that won. … … Hajime-san"

"… … What"

Once more, clearly. Shia Haulia's wish.

"… … please take me with you"

Hajime and Shia looked at each other. Hajime looked into her azure eyes to confirm her intentions.

Then… …

"… … … … … … Haa~, do whatever you like. Curious one"

Maybe because he saw something in her eyes, before long Hajime gave out a sigh then told her he gave up.

Inside the Sea of Trees, one shout of joy and a sound of disgruntled noise echoed. Having seen that, Hajime could only give out a wry smile with a lot of implications that there'll be a lot of trouble from now on.

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Chapter 7 : Haulia's Sudden Change

"Ehehe, uhehehe, kufufufu~"

Having been allowed to accompany them, Shia was happy. With both hands on her cheeks, a loose expression on her face, and that strange laughter she started letting out while twisting her body, it was a shameless appearance. So shameless that her previous seriousness, when confronting Hajime seemed like a lie.

"… … Gross"

Is what Yue muttered because she couldn't stand it anymore. Shia's excellent rabbit ears caught that mutter.

"… … Wa-, who is gross! Why would you call me gross? It's just that I was so happy that it can't be helped. After all, isn't this my first time seeing Hajime's dere side? Didn't you also see it? His previous expression. Suddenly my chest became 'kyun'(tightened)~. with this the time when he becomes hopelessly in love with me isn't that far off~"

Shia was elated and became more caught up in it. Having seen that Shia, Hajime and Yue muttered together in disgust.

""… … Annoying rabbit""

"W-wa-!? What's with that, calling me annoying rabbit! Please call me by my name already~, we are travel companions~. Don't tell me, it's not like you're unwilling want to call me by name from the very beginning, right? Right?"

""… …""

"Why did you become silent? Wait, please don't look away~. Come on, it's Shia, Shi-a. Repeat after me, Shi-a"

While Shia desperately tried to make them call her by name, Hajime and Yue only narrowed their eyes and started to discuss their future plans. Then Shia clung to them with teary eyes and said, “Don’t ignore me~, I don’t want to be left out~”. Even after becoming a travel companion, they treated her just as harshly as before.

While someone was making a racket (Shia), several Haulia tribe members appeared from the fog, they returned after clearing Hajime’s challenge; to subdue demonic beasts and return with proof in their hands. When you look closely, one of them was Kam.

Shia was smiling wide, this being the first time she’d seen her family in days. The last time she’d seen them was when she was explaining her feelings to them, before her training started. Even though it was only ten days, every day, it was deadly training. Extraordinary concentrated training at that. Because of that, for Shia, it felt like they hadn’t met each other for months.

Immediately, Shia started talking to her father, Kam. There was a lot to tell. However, right before she said anything, Shia swallowed her words. She noticed a strange atmosphere surrounding Kam and the others.

Kam who saw Shia only revealed a slight smile, immediately his gaze returned to Hajime. And…

“Boss. About the demonic beasts, have we hunted them on time?”

“Bo-boss? Fa-father? Somehow your tone… … rather, your atmosphere was…”

Because of her father’s speech and behaviour, Shia’s puzzled voice could be heard. However, she was ignored while , rustling, Kam and the others pulled out claws of the demonic beasts that could be considered high ranked in the Sea of Trees.

“… … I thought I said one was enough…”

The training graduation challenge by Hajime was to hunt a high ranking demonic beast for each team. However, there were enough parts her for ten demonic beasts. Against Hajime’s question, Kam and the others answered with fearless smiles.

“Yes, that’s what you’ve ordered, right? While we were doing that, its companions came out… … because they impudently turned their killing intent towards us, we just politely welcomed it. Right? Everyone?”

“That’s right, Boss. Those guys were too impudent for demonic beasts”

“We completely defeated them. Without missing even one, right?”

“Even though they were noisy… … their barking voices were good, fufu”

“Well it was good to serve as a warning…”

“Well, we already chopped them to pieces, wasn’t that enough?”

It was a parade of disturbing remarks. All of them, there was no trace of their original peaceful and gentle RabbitMan tribe demeanor. They reported the results of their dangerous combat to Hajime with fearless smiles and glaring eyes.

Stunned, the Shia watching this could only utter a single word,

"… … Who?"

* * *

"Wh-what happened!? Hajime-san! What on earth happened to father and the others!?"

"C-calm down! N-nothing happened… … it was the result of training…"

"Nono, what happened to make them like this!? Aren't they completely different people?! Wait, please don't look away! Look at me!"

"… … it's not like there are any big differences, right?"

"Are your eyes knotholes (ornaments)! Please look at them. A while ago they were charmed just by staring at their knives! Ah, just now, someone called their knife Julia! Normally, isn't that scary?"

Shia's angry voice filled with frustration echoed in the Sea of Trees. What on earth had happened? That was what Kam and the others thought while exchanging glances between Hajime and Shia, with confused expressions. They exchanged glances for a while until the other members of the Haulia tribe came back, all of them were… … that is to say… … they look wild. Not only the adult males but also the females, children and even the elderly.

Shia pointed at her family that completely changed, while approaching Hajime with tremendous momentum to urge him for an explanation. Hajime awkwardly averted his gaze while being interrogated by Shia.

Maybe she judged she wouldn't be able to make any progress, so Shia changed her target to Kam and the others.

"Father! Everyone! What on earth has happened!? It's as if you're different people!? From before, you've only been saying frightening things… … please come back to your senses!"

Kam who was clung onto by Shia, started to loosen his glaring expression and reverted to his gentle expression. That made Shia a little relieved.

However…

"What are you saying, Shia? We are sane/okay. It's just that we have awoken to the truth of this world. It's all thanks to Boss"

"T-the truth? What was that?"

Having a bad feeling about it, Shia asked while her cheeks twitched, and Kam smiled while confidently declaring.

“90% of this world’s problems can be solved with violence”

“It was a different person after all?! My gentle father was already dead~, uwaa~n”

Because of the shock, Shia ran and disappeared into the Sea of Trees while crying. However, before she got into the fog, a small shadow immediately appeared before her and she fell on her butt while “hauu” letting out a miserable voice.

That small shadow was able to keep its balance without falling, then it stretched out its hand towards Shia.

“Th-thank you very much”

“Well, think nothing of it, Shia big sis(anego). It was the natural thing for a man”

“B-big sis (A-anego)?”

What appeared from the fog was a boy from the Haulia tribe that could still be called a child. On his shoulder was a big crossbow while two knives and a slingshot-like weapon were attached to his waist. It was a boy who often displays a nihilistic smile. Shia who was never called “anego” until now looked up, in front of her was the boy that usually called her “Shia-oneechan” so she was puzzled by it.

With Shia staring at him with a skeptical gaze, the boy pit-pat walked up in front of Hajime then he gloriously saluted him.

“Boss! I am sorry to come back empty-handed! There is something that I must report! Permission to speak!”

“O-ou? What is it?”

At boy’s veteran soldier-like atmosphere, even though it’s too late, Hajime thought Shia was right, and that it was a little too much. And then he stuttered a little. The boy continued his report without a care.

“Affirmative! Problem found while pursuing demonic beasts, I discovered a group of fully-armed Bearman tribe. The place was on the route to the Great Tree. Perhaps they thought to ambush us!”

“A~, they’ve come as expected. Although I thought they’d come immediately… … I see, they wanted to crush us in front of our goal huh. It was a somewhat good demeanor. … … then?”

“Affirmative! If it’s okay, how about leaving those guys to us, Haulia!”

“We~ll. How about it, Kam? Do you have anything to say?”

Having heard that, Kam was shaken, and since it was something he wished for he began to grin with a fearless smile then nodded.

“By all means, leave it to us. Our power, we wanted to know… … how far our power has come, compared to them. Wha~t, it’s not like we will show anything disgraceful.”

Having heard their chief’s words, the surrounding Haulia tribe, all of them, showed belligerent expressions. The number of people who called their weapons by name with increasing admiration could be felt. Shia’s expression was dyed with despair.

“… … Can you do it?”

“Affirmative!”

The one who cheerfully answered Hajime’s last confirmation was the boy. Hajime once again closed his eyes then breathed deeply and ‘Ka’ opened his eyes wide.

“Hear me! Everyone from Haulia tribe! Every one of you brave and resolute warriors! Today, you’re graduated from being shitty maggots! You are no longer the worthless existence to be weeded out! Crush unjustness with power, hold down those hostilities with wisdom! O strongest warriors! Teach those bears “bleep” for inciting our resentment by bringing us to our current situation! Those guys are nothing but redundant stepping stones! They are only “bleep”! Build mountains with their corpses, and rivers with their blood, as proof! The proof of your rebirth! The proof to everyone in the Sea of Trees, to show that the Haulia tribe is reborn!”

“”””””””””””””””” Sir, yes, Sir!!”””””””””””””””””

“Answer me! Everyone! The greatest and strongest warriors! What is it that you wish for!”

“”””””””””””””””” Kill them!! Kill them! Kill them!!”””””””””””””””””

“What is your specialty!”

“”””””””””””””””” Kill!! Kill!! Kill!!”””””””””””””””””

“If there are enemies what will you do!”

“”””””””””””””””” Kill them all!! Kill them all!! Kill them all!!”””””””””””””””””

“That’s right! Kill them all! You can do it! Take the right to live with your own hands!”

“”””””””””””””””” Aye, aye, Sir!!”””””””””””””””””

“That’s the spirit! Everyone of the Haulia tribe! I only have one order! Search & destroy! Go!!”

“”””””””””””””””” YAHAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAA!!!!!”””””””””””””””””

“Uwaa~n, all the members of my family are dead after all~”

Under Hajime's command, the Haulia tribe members' fierceness returned and they disappeared into the fog. The tribe which was once gentle, peaceful, and above all weak at fighting… … where have they gone? That was the only thing she could say. Having seen her family completely change once more, while collapsing Shia's vain cry echoed in the Sea of Trees. As expected, because she couldn't stand it anymore, Yue patted and stroked Shia's head to comfort her.

When the boy beside Shia, who 'hic"hic' 'sob"sob' cried, tried to go, he was called to a stop by Shia.

"Pal-kun! Please wait! L-look, don't you see a beautiful flower-san over here? Even if you don't go… … how about you wait here with onee-chan? Okay? How about it?

Apparently, she seems to be trying to at least bring this little boy back to his former self. She pointed at the beautifully blossoming flowers while desperately trying to persuade him. The reason she used a flower was because this boy loved flowers so much that he even said "Flower-sa~n" before.

The flower boy named Pal who was called out to stop by Shia, only 'yare yare daze' shook his head and shrugged his shoulders while sighing "Fuu~". It looked like the overreactions used by the Europeans and Americans.

"Anego, please don't open up my old wound. I've already gotten rid of my past. The weak mind that enjoyed the beauty of flowers is no more"

By the way, this boy called Pal is 11 years old this year.

"O-old wound? Get rid of your past? Wait, I don't understand, but do you mean you don't like flowers anymore?"

"Yes, I have thrown away those feelings along with my past"

"That, even though you loved them so much…"

"Fuh, it was just a mistake of youth"

I repeat, Pal-kun is 11 years old this year.

"More importantly, anego"

"W-what is it?"

Having seen the changes in the boy who had sometimes picked flowers and dearly called out "Shia-oneechan! Shia-oneechan!", Shia's consciousness started to escape reality. She was barely able to reply to Pal's words. However, it became the signal for her to further her pursuit (of escapism).

"I've also thrown away my weak name along with the past. Now my name is Baltoferd. From now on please call me "Baltoferd of Certain Death""

“Who was that!? Where did that Baltoferd come from!? Rather, what’s with certain death!?”

“Oh, sorry. My comrades are waiting so it’s my time to go. Well then!”

“A, hey! What do you mean by “well then!”! Even now, our talk is still eh, fast! Wait! Please wait~”

Just like a woman that was left behind by her lover, Shia collapsed while her hand tried to reach the other side of the fog. No one answered her, this girl’s family, all of them fiercely went to the battlefield. Shia who was gakkuri drooped, once again hic hic cried. The family that this girl once knew was no more. It was truly a pitiful sight.

Shia’s appearance was seen by Yue who wore a subtle expression because she couldn’t say anything to her. Hajime who felt it was somewhat awkward let his gaze wander. Yue’s gaze turned to Hajime then bluntly muttered.

“… … as expected of Hajime, to be able to calmly accomplish something no one can”

“Well, like I said before where did you get that material…”

“… … to be able to use that dark magic, brainwash… … amazing”

“… … honestly, I think it was a little too much. Even though there’s neither reflection nor regret”

For a while, in the place left behind by the Haulia tribe, Shia’s crying voice and subtle atmosphere hung in the air.

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Chapter 8 : Hajime’s Failure

Regin Banton was a strong man, rumored to be the next Chief of the Banton tribe; one of the Bearman tribes. He idolized one of the current Elders; Jin Banton, and became his right hand.

Not only Regin, it could be said Jin was popular in the Banton tribe as a whole, especially the younger ones. The reasons for that being Jin’s character was broad minded, containing deep patriotism, and above all, his strength, which allowed him to be considered as one of the highest class among the demi-human race.

That’s why, when the Bearman tribe heard the news, they thought it was a bad joke. They couldn’t believe their beloved Elder had been incapacitated by a human. However, the merciless reality was proven. Jin, who was lying powerless in medical facility showed them the truth .

Regin was dumbfounded having seen Jin's current appearance. Next, his anger and hatred surfaced. While bearing these feelings inside his heart, he pressed to determine the circumstances from the Elders. As the result, Regin who had learned everything, disregarded the Elders and told the Bearman tribe everything. And thus they embarked for revenge.

Because of the persuasion from the Elders and other tribes, not all of the Bearman tribe followed him, only the youngsters from Banton tribe who admired Jin had left to defeat that hated human. They numbered around 50 people. Regin and the others who knew their enemy's objective thought it best to attack when their enemy was in front of the Great Tree as revenge. They thought, "To perish right before the goal is the best (revenge)".

After all, their enemies only consists of humans and the RabbitMan tribe. Even though Jin was defeated, they thought it was because something cowardly, like a surprise attack. They thought there was nothing to fear of humans who would go mad without a sense of direction deep inside the Sea of Trees' fog, even more so for the weak RabbitMan tribe. Regin was an outstanding person. Normally, he wouldn't interpret the situation like that. However, currently his eyes were clouded by anger.

However, no matter what, even if his eyes were clouded…

"This is wrong!?"

Regin screamed in disbelief. The reason; before his very eyes an impossible spectacle was displayed. The RabbitMan tribe, which was placed at the bottom among other demi-humans, was cornering the Bearman tribe, which was known as one of the strongest in combat.

"Come on come on come on! Show your fighting spirit! Or else, I will cut you!"

"AHAHAHAHAHA, scream like the pig you are!"

"It's time to clean this filth! HYAHAHAHAHA HA!"

While the Haulia tribe swung countless fatal, murderous attacks, their loud laughter resounded. There was no appearance of the RabbitMan tribe which was gentle, peaceful, and above all, weak in combat. Screams came from the Bearman tribe that desperately try to fight back.

"Shit! The heck is this! Just who the hell are you!!"

"They must not be the RabbitMan tribe!"

"Uwaaaa! Stay away! Stay awaaaay!"

They were ambushed by the enemies they wanted to ambush, the RabbitMan tribe that laid in ambush showed unbelievable power, even among other demi-human races. Arrows and stones that fly accurately out of nowhere, added to their excellent teamwork. The glee with which they swung their blades, wearing lunatic expressions, and laughing loudly all the while! All of it gave birth to violent commotion. In that situation, their specs even exceed the Bearman tribe.

Actually, the RabbitMan tribe wouldn't be able to compete in a one on one fight against the Bearman tribe. However, in these past ten days, the Haulia tribe was able to make up the difference, thanks to the hell-like training.

Originally, the RabbitMan tribe's specs were lower than the other demi-human races. However, to survive and avoid battle, they had polished their stealth ability and danger perception. After all, they could only survive that way.

As a result, they were able to promptly perceive their enemies' presences to the point they could ambush their enemies. It could be said that they are a race with abilities suited for assassination. However, their innate nature had crushed these advantages.

It could be said, Hajime's training woke their combat instincts. He single-handedly abused and cornered them by letting them swing weapons, cut their enemies, and letting them experience how to evade, without rest. By remembering the speech from senior sergeant Hart**n, as a result of ten days of severe training, their minds completely became combat oriented. Although he did feel like it was too much…

They, who had acquired the aggressiveness to attack without any hesitation, demonstrated promising combat prowess. Because they thought of the whole tribe as members of one family, their level of teamwork was high from the get go. With their skillful adjustment of presence, it demonstrated tremendous effect, along with their teamwork.

In addition, one of the reasons for the Haulia tribe's high combat prowess was the weapons made by Hajime, which increased their incompetent attack power.

Each of them wielded two Kodachis, produced with a precise and practiced process, such that their ultra-thin blades were able to split a grass just by touching it. They were made of Taur ore, so they were durable. The Haulia tribe also carried disposable throwing knives.

There were also the powerful Slingshots and Crossbows that were made using string with great elasticity gathered from spider-like demonic beasts in the Abyss. They were made for the children of the Haulia tribe, since close range battles were still too hard for them. Even children are able to shoot enemies from the other side of fog, using their search ability while they instinctively looked up to Hajime.

Even Pal… … Baltoferd of Certain Death, was completely charmed when shooting his Crossbow, while showing a sniper-like nature.

"One shot of certain death! 'DO' your was head blown off. In the name of "Certain Death""

Pal… .. Baltoferd of Certain Death recently gained the habit of saying such things. By the way, he called himself "Certain Death". His first habitual saying was "Aim and Shoot!" but it was stopped by Hajime. He looked so displeased.

Back on topic, the Bearman tribe who fell into a panic were easily defeated without much resistance by the current Haulia tribe and their numbers fell in no time. Currently half of them had been killed in the vicinity.

"Regin-dono! If this keeps up-"

“Retreat!”

“Let me take care of the re-KUPE!?”

“Tontoo!?”

Having heard his subordinate advise him to retreat, Regin was hesitating because of anger from the incapacitated Jin and his killed subordinates. That hesitation wasn’t missed by the Haulia’s sniper. To the subordinate called Tonto that tried to advise his lord to retreat once again, an arrow accurately penetrated his temple.

Because of this Regin and his subordinates were shaken and fell into disorder. Kam and the others who thought it was a chance, attacked at once.

Arrows came flying from the fog and accurately aimed at their ankles. While distracted by that, a sharp attack came to reap the head. With an exquisite timing, the person who wanted to kill the one that shot arrows from the back ran into protruding spikes.

However, perhaps it was because that was their favorite move, a presence suddenly came from behind, and brought with it a fatal blow. Haulia tribe utilized their presence and teamwork to make fun of Regin and his subordinates. Regin and his subordinates shuddered at this. They thought, “Are they really that hetare and weak RabbitMan tribe!?”

The battle dragged on for a while, Regin and his subordinates were finally able to recover from their confusion while covered in wounds. They were somehow able to stand using their weapons as support. When the waves of attacks using the exquisite covering fire and teamwork subsided, all of them were panting. Regin and his subordinates were surrounded by Kam and the others, after being cornered with a gigantic tree to their backs.

“What happened, you “bleep”?! Is that all?! Wuss!”

“I heard you were the strongest tribe! You “bleep”! Even so you were “bleep”!

“Poise your weapons quickly! Are you “bleep”‘s already weak in the knees?!”

They thought it was not the RabbitMan tribe, with how they bombarded the other tribe with insults. The Bearman tribe which trembled in fear could only think, “What had happened to these guys!?” With broken spirits, some of them trembled while holding their heads. A big hairy man said, “Can you let us go?” with teary eyes… … truly a surreal spectacle.

“KU KU KU, did you have anything else to say? O strongest tribe?”

Kam let out that sarcasm with a truly evil expression. They who had awoken to their fighting spirit seemed to have thought about their circumstances when they were looked down upon. It was a speech that couldn’t be heard from the Kam of the past.

“Nuguu…”

Having heard Kam’s objection, Regin’s expression distorted in regret. He somehow recovered from the confusion and reasoning came back to his eyes. Even though he had been

doused with cold water by Haulia tribe's strong assault, because of the incapacitated Jin, the flame of anger still burnt inside of him. But, because he felt a sense of responsibility to bring his surviving subordinates back alive, he regained his mind. He consciously knew it was his fault that they fell into such a predicament because he was the one that spurred them on.

"… … you can do anything to me. Boil me or burn me, just do whatever you like. However, I was the one who forcibly brought my subordinates. I want you to let them go"

"Wh-, Regin-dono!?"

"Regin-dono! That was…"

Having heard Regin's words, his subordinates started to make a commotion. It was because he tried to save his subordinates in exchange for his own life. To these subordinates, Regin scolded.

"Silence! … … it was my responsibility because of the blood that surged to my head clouded my eyes. RabbitMan… … no, Chief of Haulia tribe. I know it is selfish of me. However, I want to save their lives! That's all."

Regin released his weapon then started to kneel while bowing his head. His subordinates knew of Regin's great pride as a warrior, so they understood how much resolution he had to bow his head to the enemy. That's why they couldn't obey his order to stay silent.

Kam's answer to Regin who was still bowing was…

"I refuse"

While throwing his knife.

"Uo!?"

Regin was able to dodge by a hairs-breadth. However, starting with Kam's attack, Regin and his subordinates were attacked from the surrounding with arrows and stones fired at high velocity, at once. Using their big axes as shields, Regin and subordinates desperately tried to defend themselves, and then from the Haulia tribe came laughter from the bottom of their heart, completing their attacks.

"Why!?"

Regin squeezed a voice as he groaned to ask them for the reason they attacked.

"Why? Aren't you our enemies? Are other reasons necessary to kill you?"

Kam's answer was a simple fact.

"Guh, but!"

"Above all… .. it's enjoyable to crush and make fun of your arrogance! HA HA HA!"

“W-Wh-!? Bastards! To these guys-!”

Just as Kam said, Haulia tribe looked like they truly enjoyed it. Using Slingshots and Crossbows, they made fun of them by shooting from a safe area. Their appearances were those of people drunk on power. It looks like their heart’s didn’t mind killing people for the first time, even if it was their demi-human brethren. In short, they’ve become completely berserk.

With increasing severity in their attacks, Regin and his subordinates who had stayed close together, and desperately tried to defend were… … finally reaching their limit. Although they avoided fatal attacks, they were covered in wounds. They won’t be able to endure the next volley.

Kam, with a warped grin, ‘sutto’ raise his hand. Haulia tribe with frenzied eyes start to aim with arrows and stones at the ready. Regin who thought this wasn’t an appropriate place to die, gathered his power, and inside his mind he apologized to his subordinates.

Kam’s hand, like a death god’s scythe that hunted the lives of Regin and his subordinates, was lowered. Arrows and stones immediately shot. In slow motion, Regin continued to watch this without looking away, until…

“Stop it already!!!”

Zudoooooon!!

A spectacle where a white hammer blew everything away could be seen.

“Ha?”

Regin who was dumbfounded by it unintentionally let out that voice. However, that can’t be helped. Immediately after they accepted their death, a rabbit-eared girl with pallid hair along with a giant hammer fell from the sky, then the hammer struck the ground. It resulted in the shockwave that blew away all the incoming arrows and stones. When they saw that, the surrounding Bearman tribe could only give a blank stare.

Shaking anger! That was the feeling that could be felt, of course it came from Shia. The Sledgehammer made using the compression method had extraordinary mass. As if she didn’t feel the weight, it was brandished with a ‘Buonn’ then generated a gust. ‘Bishi’ it was pointed toward Kam.

“Aghh! Seriously arghh! Father and everyone, please come to your sense already!”

Looking at Shia, Kam and the others who were initially stunned in astonishment, with ‘ha’ regained themselves while look toward her blaming.

“Shia, though I don’t know why you did this, but please move from there. Or else we won’t be able to kill the ones behind you, you know?”

“No, I won’t move. I won’t allow anymore than this!”

Having heard Shia's words, Kam and the others narrowed their eyes.

"Won't allow? Shia, don't tell me you wanted to be together with our enemy? According to your answer…"

"No, I don't care if these guys died"

"""" Is that okay!? """"

The Bearman tribe that thought she came to stop her tribe, unintentionally let out a remark to Shia.

"Of course. If I took it easy against enemies that came with killing intent, I wouldn't be able to endure Yue-san's training. Even I don't have that naive thought anymore"

"Fumu, then why did you stop us"

Kam asked her. Haulia tribe also have inquiring expressions.

"Isn't that obvious! Father and the others will be broken at this rate! And become more degenerated!"

"Broken? Degenerate?"

Having heard Shia's word, Kam and the others can only put 'I don't understand" expressions.

"That's right! Please remember it. Hajime-san was merciless against enemies, no talking was necessary, even more merciless, he enjoyed killing demonic beasts and people (…) things like that! Even during training, if you were told to kill the enemies, you shouldn't have enjoyed it!"

"W-well, it's not like we enjoy…"

"Just now, did father and the others know what kind of faces you made?

"Face? Well, even if you said that…"

Having heard Shia's words, the Haulia tribe started to look at each others faces. Shia let out a calm breath, however, her voice clearly informed them.

"… … it was just like those Empire's Soldiers that attacked us"

"Kh!?"

It shocked them, enough to blow off their frenzy. Their mood was as if they were doused with cold water. To have the same expressions as those who scorned their family with pleasure and caught them… … having actually witnessed that they understood the ugliness of their action. To be the same as those who snacthed their family away… … was an unbearable fact.

“Sh-Shia… I was…”

“Fuu, it looks like you have calmed down. Thank god. At worst, I thought I might have to beat you all down”

With ‘furifuri’, Shia swung the Sledgehammer around. Having heard Shia point that out, immediately Haulia tribe was trembling in front of the Sledgehammer while Shia loosened her cheeks a little.

“Well, it was your first battle, if you realized that now then it’ll be okay! It was Hajime-san’s fault after all! Although I understand the importance of fighting spirit, that was too much! Rather than fighting spirit, it was more like you became berserkers!”

This time, Shia was ‘puripuri’ angry at Hajime. A small voice of Shia muttering can be heard, “Just why did I fall for that kind of person”.

And at that time, a gunshot can be heard.

From Shia’s back, “Guwa!?” a groan could be heard, along with sound of something collapsing. Now that they think about it, while in a panic Shia and the others remember the existences that they’d forgotten about, then looked behind their back, there laid Regin who writhed in pain while holding his forehead.

“Why the heck are you trying to run away while their attention was diverted? Until their talk is over sit in seiza now!”

Hajime accompanied by Yue appeared from inside the fog. It seems while Shia and the others were immersed in their talk, Regin and his subordinates tried to run away, only to get shot. However, it wasn’t known why he used the non-lethal rubber bullet.

Although they heard Hajime’s words, the Bearman tribe tried to vigilantly examine their surroundings to keep running away, but Hajime silenced them with “Pressure”. While casting glances at them, Hajime and Yue looked at Shia and the others.

When Hajime saw Kam and the others, some of them felt awkward and looked the other way. However, immediately after words of apology came to Kam and the others.

“A, well, what to say, sorry. Because I was fine with it, I’d completely forgotten the shock of murder. It was my mistake. Un, I am sorry”

Shia and the others can only ‘pokan’ blankly stare at him with opened mouths. That was because they heard an unexpected but honest apology.

“Bo-boss!? Are you okay!? Did you hit your head!?”

“Medic! Medic! There is a person with serious injury here!”

“Boss! Please steady yourself!”

That’s why it became such reactions. With veins popping on his head, his mouth twitched.

This time, Hajime himself truly thought it was his mistake. Because he didn't feel anything when he kills, he didn't consider the shock that was supposed to occur with it. No matter how much stronger he had become, he didn't have any experience in teaching, as a result, he almost broke the Haulia tribe's minds. Indeed, he thought it was dangerous, that's why he said those words of apology… … but their reaction was to doubt his sanity. Hajime thought, "Should I be angry?", he was hesitating while getting back into his usual attitude.

Hajime put this matter aside for now, approached Regin then put Donner's muzzle at his forehead.

"Well then, will it be a brave death or to survive and live in shame, which will it be?"

Having heard Hajime's words, the Bearman and Haulia tribe looked at him with surprised eyes. By his speech just now, they heard that he'd overlook the Bearman tribe depending on the situation. It was a serious proposal from Hajime who had no mercy and was unreserved against his enemies. Kam and the others looked at Hajime in sorrow while thinking, "As expected his head was…". Even though more veins popped on Hajime's head, but because there'd be no progress otherwise, he let it through(go) temporarily.

Regin looked at Hajime with a surprised expression. It was the man who had brought about the complete change in the Haulia tribe, he thought this man wouldn't show any mercy.

"… what does it mean, do you want to let us go?"

"Aa, you can return if you want, you know?"

"Conditions?"

To easily say that they could return, aside from Regin, the others were in commotion. From behind it could be heard, "If I hit his head now maybe it can help…", was what Shia said with serious expression while alternating her gaze between her Sledgehammer and Hajime's head. Voices of agreement could be heard from Kam and the others.

It was about the time that Hajime seriously thought of punishing them while more veins popped out. However, he worked harder to let that through(go).

"Aa, condition huh. When you reached Faea Belgaen I want you to say something to the Elders"

"… … A message?"

While he nervously thought about what kind of conditions he might demand, it turned out he only needed to be a messenger, and that took him aback. However, he was frozen when the content was spoken.

""You owe me one""

"… … Kh!? That's!"

"Well? What will you do? Will you accept it?"

Because he knew what that meant, Regin unintentionally let out a shout. Hajime was, with wind blowing from somewhere, waiting for Regin's choice. "You owe me one" means, by letting the attacker return alive, there will be a time they must pay back their debt.

With the loss of one of the Elders, as well as how they agonized over ignoring the decision made by the Elders Conference to not intervene with him, if this message was passed on then they must unconditionally answer Hajime's request.

If everything were to be seen objectively, in Jin's situation and in Regin's situation, where he one-sidedly tried to take revenge, coupled with the fact that they were allowed to live, the Elders Conference's prestige will surely take a fall. They were outlaws because they disregarded the Elders. And can't be said Hajime won't one day turn his fang towards the Elders.

In other words, for Regin and his subordinates to survive meant that they'd brought back a weakness to their home country. Even after disregarding the decision from Elders Conference, they carried back a debt on their shoulders. Moreover, to return with half of their members dead after boasting about themselves as the strongest tribe… … just as Hajime had said they'd lived in shame.

Hajime choose to further his attack against Regin who wore a distorted expression.

"Add to that, you must remember that your subordinates' deaths were your own responsibility, along with your crushing defeat against the Haulia"

"Guu"

There was a reason for Hajime to make such a condition. Of course it wasn't out of benevolence. It was because there are details of the Seven Great Dungeons that he doesn't know yet, so even though Faea Belgaen was an isolated country, there might be something else he must do in this country. There was also the tradition inherited from its founder after all. Hajime thought there might be little failures that will come along the way, for that sake, he thought that insurance was necessary.

To the worrying Regin, Hajime was 'Gorik' further pressing the muzzle.

"Decide it in five seconds. Once that's over I'll kill you one by one. "Quick judgement". Isn't that the basics (of a leader)?"

After that, Hajime began to count o~ne, two~ and Regin was panicking, however nothing comes to his mind.

"I, I understand. I wish for us to return!"

"I see. Then, go quickly. Don't forget the message. If when the time comes for me to call for that and discover that you tried to fool me…"

A strong killing intent overflowed from Hajime's whole body, accompanied with physical pressure. 'Gulp' the sound of gulp-ing resounded clearly.

“That day will be the end of Faea Belgaen”

No matter who looked at him, he had the touch of a bad debt collector, no, it’s more like a terrorist in this case. From behind, he could hear, “Thank goodness. It was the usual Hajime-san” and “Boss finally regained his mind!”, that kind of strange talk mixed with a relieved tone, well for now he’ll let it through(slide). He didn’t want to break the atmosphere that he made with so much effort. However, harsh punishment will follow.

With their pride broken by Haulia tribe and having heard how Regin desperately begged for his subordinates’ lives, they didn’t have the strength to protest and started to return home dejectedly. It might be because they are centered around a young one, they obediently accepted their defeat. But, for Regin, his influence in Faea Belgaen would likely disappear. There is also the possibility of being treated as fugitive. However, it was a mild punishment, after all he’d tried to take someone else’s life unjustly.

The Bearman tribe disappeared into the other side of the fog. After confirming that, Hajime turned around toward Shia and the others. At first, they were unable to see his expression because he looked down, then somehow the atmosphere became strange. Kam and the others who felt dishonored to have fallen into such frenzy and madness, started to become engrossed in speaking to Hajime about a lot of things, while not noticing the atmosphere. Only Shia , “Huh? Isn’t this bad?”, said that while drenched in cold sweat.

Hajime started to look up while swaying. There was a big smile on his face. However, his narrowed eyes weren’t smiling at all. Finally, because he thought Hajime’s appearance was strange, Kam timidly asked him.

“Bo-Boss?”

“Yes, isn’t it a serious thing? I thought this time, it was my fault. To say you’ve reached the standard just like this, I must have thought of it as a brake”

“N-no, even if you say that… … it was because of our own immaturity…”

“Nono, it’s okay, you know? I admit it myself after all. That’s why, that’s why I thought to honestly apologize… … but you had quite the reaction, didn’t you? Well, I understand. After all my usual attitude was like that… … however, however… … this out of place feeling I have, I must let it out… … you understand what that means, right?”

“N-no. We were a little…”

Kam also thought, “Ah, this is bad. He is angry now”, with cold sweat rapidly pouring out of him, step by step he tried to retreat. Maybe because some of the Haulia remember the training, they suddenly stood still while crying and whimpering.

And at that time, “Now is my chance!”, was what Shia thought then she instantly started to turn her feet to escape. She didn’t forget to make a man nearby as a shield.

However…

DOPANn!!

One bullet passed through between that man's leg, hit the ground and ricocheted when it struck a tree's root finally hitting Shia in the butt.

"Hakyun!"

It was one of Hajime's gun skills "Polygonal Shot". That's how he aimed his shot at Shia's butt. It was a useless gun skill, that could be thought as not that useless, that he'd uselessly practiced. Because of the impact from the bullet Shia raised a scream and 'pyon' jumped, only to collapse on the ground with her butt in the air. 'Shuu-' Smoke rose from her butt. Shia was twitching in pain.

Having seen Shia convulsing and Hajime's gun skill, Kam and the others were trembling in fear. The man who had a bullet pass between his leg covered his groin with both hands while teary eyed. He patted his groin, because when the bullet passed, it caught the shockwave from the bullet.

Without doing anything else, Hajime put back Donner into its holster, then his hanya-like smile returned. Finally, he yelled out with angry tone.

"For now, everyone will be hit once!"

Waaaaaa—!!

All of Haulia members immediately scattered trying to escape just like newborn spiders. For a while, screams and an angry roar could be heard resounding inside the Sea of Trees.

The only one who remained in her place was Shia with smoke rising from her butt, and

"… … when will we go to the Great Tree?"

The mutters from Yue who wasn't involved with all the commotion.

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Chapter 9 : The Great Tree's Secret

Deep inside the fog, Hajime and his party advanced toward the Great Tree. They left the fighting to Kam, while the other Haulia members scattered into their surroundings, looking for enemies as part of their training. Because the fact that unpreparedness is one's greatest foe already is carved into their flesh, all members wore serious expressions. Most of all, the blue bruises on their bodies made it so it couldn't be helped…

"Uu~, it's still tingling~"

Shia was whining while rubbing her butt. Since before, she looked at Hajime with resentful eyes.

“Stop looking at me like that, it’s annoying.”

“To say that it’s annoying was too much. It’s not common sense to shoot at a girl’s butt. Moreover, using that useless high skill-”

“That can also be said to you. You seriously thought to hit my head and use another person as a shield to run away… … that was not something a normal person would do.”

Near them, a man from the Haulia tribe nodded his head.

“Uu, it was the result of education by Yue-san…”

“… … I was the one that raised Shia.”

“… … I can’t comment on that.”

While boasting that, Yue looked at Hajime as if saying “Praise me.” Hajime was averting his gaze making good use of “Let it through skill”.

After they advanced for 15 minutes while chatting harmoniously, their party finally arrived at the Great Tree.

Hajime’s first opinion when he looked at the Great Tree was,

“… … the heck this is”

, while half-surprised and half-doubting. Yue also wore the slight expression of someone who had her expectations crumbling. The two of them were imagining it using the scale and a larger version of the trees in Faea Belgaen.

However, the real Great Tree was… … splendidly withered.

Its size was not that far off from their imagination. Its diameter alone could be estimated around 50 meters. There is also the bizarre difference from the surrounding trees. While the surrounding trees had the ever expanding green leaves, only the Great Tree was withered.

“The Great Tree was already withered even before the founding of Faea Belgaen. However, it didn’t rot. Ever the never changing withered tree. With the surrounding fog’s nature and the forever-withered-without-rotting Great Tree, this place became a sacred place. Well, even with that said, although it could be called a tourist spot…”

Kam explained to Hajime and Yue making inquiring faces. While hearing the explanation, Hajime looked around the Great Tree’s roots. Just as Alfrerick had said, there was a lithograph built.

“This is… … just like Orcus’ door’s…”

“… … Nn, the same crest”

On the lithograph there were seven system-like squares with seven crests engraved on top of it. It was completely the same as the one on Orcus’ room’s door. To prove it, Hajime took out Orcus’ ring. The pattern on the ring was completely the same as one of the patterns on the Lithograph after all.

“It was the entrance to the Great Dungeon after all… but… … what should we do about this?”

Hajime approached the Great Tree and started to ‘thud thud’ hit it and of course there was no change, when he tried to ask Kam and the others if they know something about this tree, they only had No as an answer. Although he already heard all of the traditions from Alfrerick, there wasn’t any concerning the entrance. There was a possibility that he hid it so Hajime started to think, “Should I collect the debt?”,

At that time, Yue who was observing the lithograph raised her voice.

“Hajime… … look at this.”

“Nn? Is something there?”

What Yue noticed was on the other side of the lithograph. There were empty dents that corresponded with the seven crests on the other side.

“This is…”

Hajime put the Orcus ring in his hand to the dent that he saw corresponded to Orcus’ crest.

Then… … the lithograph began to faintly shine.

Wondering what happened, the surrounding Haulia tribe that were on lookout began to gather. For a while, they looked at the shining lithograph which lights gradually faded and somehow characters appeared in its place. Something was written there.

Four proofs.
Power of Rebirth.
Guidepost of Spun Bond.
A new trial will be opened to the one who has those proof.

“… … What does it mean?”

“… … Rhe four proofs… … maybe, wasn’t it referring to the other Dungeons’ proofs?”

“… … Then, what does the Power of Rebirth and Guidepost of Spun Bond mean?”

Shia answered to Hajime who puzzled over it.

“U~n, Guidepost of Spun Bond, wasn’t that it? Whether you got demi-human race as guides or not. Only demi-humans are able to move around easily in the Sea of Trees, and to gain the demi-humans as guides in the Sea of Tree was an exception among exception”

“… … I see. It was something like that”

“… … Next was regeneration… … Me?”

Yue pointed at herself who owns the special magic, “Auto Regeneration”. To test it, she thinly gave a cut to her finger to activate “Auto Regeneration” while moving to touch the Great Tree… … but there was no change at all.

“Muu… … it looks like that was wrong.”

“… … nn~, to the withered tree… … Power of Rebirth… … along with four proofs… … it’s possible that the four proofs meant we have to conquer half of the Seven Great Dungeons, then we might obtain the age of gods magic concerning rebirth, was it something like that?”

Hajime was wondering whether they must use that to restore the withered tree. Yue also gave a consenting face.

“Haa~, damn. So it was impossible to conquer it right now… … even though it was troublesome, there is nothing else we can do but to go to the other dungeons…”

“Nn…”

Hajime could only grind his teeth having come this far. Yue also regretted it. However, because they couldn’t enter the Great Dungeon now, although it worried them, it couldn’t be helped. They switched their target to obtaining three more proofs for now.

Hajime then gathered the Haulia tribe.

“As you’ve heard, we are aiming to conquer the other Great Dungeons now. The promise that you kept to guide us to the Great Tree is over now. If it’s the current you, even without Faea Belgaen’s protection, you’ll be able to survive inside the Sea of Trees. That means, this is good bye”

Then, he took a peek at Shia. His eyes asked her if she wanted to leave behind some words, and Shia understood perfectly that now was the time to voice her intentions. Even though she’ll be back, conquering three of the Great Dungeons would take much time. She wouldn’t be able to meet her family during that time.

Shia nodded, then took a step forward to talk to Kam and the others”

“Fath- “Boss! I have something to say!” … … huuh, father? This is my turn…”Kam took a step forward while ignoring Shia. ‘Bishi’, then stood at attention. On his side, “Father? Wait, father?”, Shia’s words could be heard and as if he was a British guardsman he just looked ahead while standing upright.

“A~, what is it?”

For the time being Shia called out, father? father?, but was ignored, while Hajime asked Kam. Kam, while not looking at Shia and ignoring her, started to tell the consensus from the Haulia tribe.

“Boss, please take us along!”

“Eh! Everyone also wanted to go with Hajime-san!?”

Shia was surprised at Kam’s words. In the discussion ten days ago, what happened with that mood when you were sending me off!?, were the words she said.

“We are Haulia but at the same time not Haulia! We are Boss’s subordinates! By all means, take us along! This is our tribe’s consensus!”

“Wait a sec, father! I’ve never heard of that! Rather, for what purpose did I have to go through those hardships…”

“I admit, we are jealous of Shia!”

“He admits that! He really said that! Really, what happened in those ten days!”

While Kam said the tribe’s consensus, he ignored Shia’s remark. What is this situation?, was what Hajime thought then frankly answered.

“I refuse.”

“Why!?”

Kam tried to ask the reason for Hajime’s quick reply. The other Haulia tribe members also approached Hajime in impatience.

“Of course it’s because you will only be hindrances, you idiot-”

“But!”

“Don’t get caught up in the moment. For our journey, even 180 days is too fast!”

“Is that true!?”

In addition to Kam and the others holding on to him, they started to think, “Even if it was not permitted, we will follow!” It seems because of the General Hartman-like(…)’s training, a strange sense of trust and reverence was born. If this keeps up, they’ll really follow Hajime into town. Because he didn’t want any to riot, he reluctantly gave them a condition.

“Then, that is. I want you to stay here to keep training. The next time I come to the Sea of Trees, if I can use you then I’ll make you my subordinates”

“… … Is there any falsehood in those words?”

“None at all.”

“If you lied, we’ll continue to call Boss’ name in the humans’ towns, as if we are creating a new religion, okay?”

“Y-you have quite the bad sense…”

“Well, that is because we have pride as Boss’ subordinates.”

What a bold subordinate that made Hajime’s cheeks twitch. Yue was ‘pon pom’ patting Hajime’s arm to comfort him. Hajime let out a sigh, next he looked up at the sky thinking the next time he came to the Sea of Trees will be troublesome.

“*Sob*, no one looked at me… … even though it’s the day I set off…”

Shia who was thrown to the side wrote the character ? on the ground, while no one minded her as expected.

* * *

Hajime, Yue, and Shia were escorted by Kam and the others to the boundary of the Sea of Trees, and once again they got on the magic-driven two-wheeler and dashed into the plain. The order of seating was Yue, Hajime, then Shia. Since he noticed Shia’s degree of clingy-ness had increased from the time in the Raisen Grand Canyon, Hajime tried ignoring that. Although, his reaction was immediately discovered by Yue who sat in front of him.

On his shoulder, Shia asked a question.

“Hajime-san. Now that I remember I’ve never heard about it, where was our next destination?”

“Ah? I never said it?”

“I never heard anything.”

“… … I already knew”

To the elated Yue, Shia let out a groan in protest.

“I-I am your comrade now, so please tell me something like that! Communication is important!”

“My bad. Our next destination is Raisen Grand Canyon”

“Raisen Grand Canyon?”

Having heard Hajime’s words, Shia put on a questioning expression. Currently, the Seven Great Dungeons that are already confirmed, excluding “Haltina Sea of Trees”, were “Guryuen Great Desert’s Volcanic Mountain” and “Shune Snowfield’s Ice Cave”. Because it was certainly there, doesn’t that make it the best destination?, was what she thought. Maybe because he guessed her question, Hajime started to say his intent.

“For now, I don’t even know if there was a Great Dungeon in Raisen Grand Canyon. Shune Snowfield is in the demon’s country so it’d be troublesome. Although it’s better to go to the Big Volcanic Mountain for now, if we go while passing Raisen that spreads from east to west, we’ll get there anyway. Maybe we’ll find a dungeon along the way, right?”

“T-to cross over the Raisen Grand Canyon…”

Instinctively, Shia’s cheeks twitched. Raisen Grand Canyon was popular as an execution ground. Recently, it was also the place where her family was almost annihilated. To have thought of that place as a highway shook her mind.

Hajime, who knew Shia was shaken because she was glued to him, revealed an amazed expression.

“You know, believe in your own power a little. For the current you, the demonic beasts inside the canyon aren’t that different from the demonic beasts in the boundary. Didn’t you know we can’t use magic inside Raisen? For you who specialized in body strengthening, it’s possible to move around without any hindrance. Rather, it’d be the stage for you”

“… … I am ashamed as your master”

“Uu~, I am ashamed~”

Yue looked at Shia with amazed eyes. Shia tried to change the topic.

“Th-then, because we are going to Raisen Grand Canyon, are we going to camp today? Or, are we going to the nearest village or town?”

“If possible, I wanted to arrange some seasoning for food, for the sake of the future it’d be great to get some material from the town. According to the map I’ve seen, there will be a town somewhere along here”

For extra measure, Hajime wanted to eat real food << .. >>. Also, in the future, he needed money to buy things in town. He wanted to exchange the materials he had with money before it rotted. One more thing, he wanted to try to settle in a place before setting off to the Raisen Grand Canyon.

“Haa~ is that so… … thank god”

Having heard Hajime’s words, Shia somehow showed a relieved expression. Hajime who was dumbfounded by it, “What is it”, asked her.

“Well~, from Hajime-san’s story, I thought you’d be satisfied by eating Raisen Grand Canyon’s demonic beasts’ meat… … Yue-san only needs Hajime-san’s blood so she wouldn’t have any problem… … I was thinking how I should persuade you for my personal food~, I am glad it was just my imagination. So Hajime-san also eats normal food!”

“Of course! Who likes to eat demonic beasts! … you, what did you think I am…”

“A new kind of demonic beast called Predator?”

“OK, you, I’ll tie you up until we reach the town”

“Wa-, stop, from where did you pull that out, that collar! Really, stop~ don’t put that on me~, Yue-san don’t just look, help me!”

“… … you reap what you sow”

In a sense, the three who advanced on the plain made a commotion that showed their good relationship.

After driving for several hours, finally the day grew dark and the town was finally seen in front of them. Hajime was glad, ever since he saw the sky after getting out of the Abyss, he finally got the feeling that “I am back”. Yue also looked somewhat excited. Yue turned her head slightly then their eyes met, and smiles floated on their faces.

“Umm~, although it was such a good atmosphere, this collar, can you release it? For some reason I couldn’t remove it… … umm, did you hear? Hajime-san? Yue-san? Wait, please don’t ignore me~ I am going to cry now! I am going to cry so hard that you’ll be depressed by it!”

Hajime and Yue only replied with their smiles.

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Chapter 10 : In Brook Town I

They can see a town in the distance. It was a small town enclosed with a surrounding moat and hedges. There was a gate facing the highway, with a hut by its side. It might be the guards’ post. Even though it was a small town, there was the arrangement for guards. Because of that, Hajime who thought they’d be able to do quality shopping, loosened his cheeks.

“… … If you are in a good mood, can you take off the collar already?”

Shia with a disappointed expression earnestly asked Hajime who smiled while looking at the town. Fixed on Shia’s neck was a collar with a black body embedded with a small inconspicuous crystal. It was something sturdy that Hajime used as punishment for Shia’s verbal slip. Because for some reason she couldn’t take it off, Shia asked Hajime to remove it only to have her words pass through Hajime’s ears.

Slowly, Hajime and his party could clearly see the town, so he put the magic-driven two-wheeler into the “Treasure Box”, and switched to walking on foot. It was because it’d cause a commotion to arrive with a jet black bike, after all.

Along the way, Shia kept ‘bla bla’ complaining. As expected, that just went through his ears and they finally arrived at the town’s gate. As he thought, the hut beside the gate was a guard’s post, with an armed man coming out of it. He was equipped with leather armor and a long sword on his waist, rather than a soldier he looked more like an adventurer. That adventurer-like man called Hajime and his party to stop.

“Please halt. Show your status plate. Also, what are your objectives coming to this town?”

It might be something like a regulation, because he somehow looked unmotivated. Hajime pulled out his status plate while answering the guard’s question.

“Our main objective is to secure rations. They’re to be used for our journey”

An indifferent voice, ‘Hu~m’, can be heard from the guard while he checked Hajime’s status plate. After that, he blinked his eyes, held the plate a little farther, then rubbed his eyes. Having seen the guardsman done that, Hajime with cold sweat thought, “Ah, this is bad, I forgot to hide that”.

Inside status plate, there is a function to hide the numerical value and skills’ column. Even for adventurer and mercenary, the leak of combat ability proved to be fatal. Hajime immediately tried to deceive the guard by telling him a lie.

“A while before, I was attacked by demonic beasts. It looks like it broke at that time”

“I-it broke? That was, well…”

The guard was perplexed. It was no wonder. After all, Hajime’s status plate didn’t display the level, and the numerical value of his stats, as well as his skills column were all over the place. Even though he sometimes heard of people losing the status plate, for it to be broken (in sense of it being bugged) was something he had never heard of. Normally he would just laugh it off, but something unbelievable was displayed after all, so he didn’t understand how to judge it.

To further his attack, Hajime shrugged his shoulders with a manner of someone totally bothered by it.

“If it wasn’t broken, isn’t that display too strange? It’s as if I am a monster. Mr. Guard, do I look like a monster that could destroy a town with just the tip of my finger?”?

To Hajime who used a joking gesture by opening both of his hand, the guard only gave out a wry smile. If what the status plate displayed was correct, then he would be a monster that easily surpassed even the demon kings and heroes. Even without hearing that explanation, he already considered the plate to be broken.

If he know he was truly a monster, surely, this guard would have fainted. Hajime who boldly told that lie, looked at Shia and Yue who had amazed expressions.

“Haha, well, of course I don’t see that. Even though I have never heard of any bug in the display, well, there is always a first for everything… … and those two…”

Turning his gaze to Yue and Shia, the guard asked to see their status plate. Only to be stunned. With his face dyed red, he looked alternately at Yue and Shia with a blank and unfocused look. Even though it was said before, Yue is a beautiful girl with a bisque doll-like appearance. Shia, while quiet, was also a beautiful girl that gave off a mysterious feeling. In other words, the guardsman was truly charmed by them.

Hajime unnaturally cleared his throat, then 'Hah', the guard turned his gaze to Hajime in panic.

"While we were attacked by the demonic beasts, this girl lost her plate. About this Rabbitman… … you understand, right?"

Maybe because he accepted that, the guard nodded in consent then gave back Hajime's status plate.

"Even so, just where did you get your hands on such a beauty. Aren't gray-haired members of the Rabbitman tribe rare? Are you actually a rich person?"

The guard asked Hajime with envy and jealousy mixed into his voice, while continuously taking peeks at the two. Hajime only shrugged his shoulders without giving any answer.

"Well whatever. You may pass."

"Aa, thanks. Oops, wait a sec. Where can I sell raw materials?"

"Ang? If it's that, there is the adventurer guild if you go straight through the central road. If you want to personally bring it to the store, just ask the guild. They will give you a simple map of this town."

"Ooh, you've been so kind to us. Thanks"

After receiving the information from the guard, Hajime and his party passed through the gate and entered the town. From the gate it seems that this town's name was Brook. Inside the town was a lively atmosphere. Even though it wasn't at the level of Hol-ad town which he'd seen at the outskirts of Orcus, there are quite a lot of stalls along with voices advertising their wares, and sounds of people haggling could be heard.

With such liveliness, it somehow lifted one's feeling. Not just Hajime, Yue's eyes began to look happy. However, since before, Shia was trembling and staring at Hajime with teary eyes.

Without saying anything, she only stared at him with teary eyes and because it made him anxious he let out a sigh. "To interrupt my happy mood" , was what Hajime complained in his mind while giving a glance at Shia.

"What is it? Even though we're finally inside a town, for you to make a face similar to a gorilla demonic beast that desperately tried to block a massive rock that fell from above"

"Who's a gorilla! Rather, how do you know what kind of defeated form that is! If it's Hajime-san, then it'd be blown in one move! It's somehow pitiful just by imagining it!"

“… … that’s something like poking your side with teary eyes”

“Is that a follow-up attack!? That’s too cruel! Uh, that isn’t it!”

Shia was busily rebutting while angry. She tried to appeal, “I am unhappy!”, with her whole body while flailing her hands. By the way, the episode with the gorilla-like demonic beast was a story from the time he experimented to polish the mass compression method. By no means did he not enjoy the bullying. Yue was happily poking at that time. Also, this demonic beast was the one who owned the “Great Arm” special magic.

“It’s this! This collar! Because of this I was misunderstood as a slave! Hajime-san, if you understand then remove it! Uu, it’s cruel~, aren’t we companions~”

It seems that was what Shia was angry about. Even though they are travel companions, she was shocked to have received the same treatment as a slave. Naturally, the collar that Hajime put on her wasn’t a slave’s collar, and it didn’t have the power to restrain Shia. Even Shia understood that. But, whatever is said, a shock is a shock.

Having seen that Shia, Hajime scratched his head then looked into Shia’s eyes.

“You know, for a non-slave demi-human, moreover a popular and high-in-demand rabbitman wouldn’t be able to walk freely inside a town, right? Added to that, a gray-haired one like you would attract attention along with your outstanding figure and style. If you declared that you weren’t someone’s slave, you’d be instantly marked down when we entered the town. After that, there would be a storm of kidnappers coming. It’ll be trouble-… … why are you being giddy for?”

While explaining things, Hajime suddenly glared at Shia, who became embarrassed with blushing cheeks when she heard the explanation. Yue also coldly looked at Shia.

“Mo-mou, Hajime-san. To start saying something like that in front of everyone. To say, I have an outstanding figure and style, the cutest in the world and charming, mou! It was embarras–bugera!?”

Yue’s golden right straight found its way into the cheek of Shia who was caught up in the moment. With a love filled mind, Shia raised a scream then collapsed. Without using body strengthening, she got up while rubbing her cheek that was reddened in a different way from before.

“… … Don’t get carried away”

“… … I’b sobby, Yue-zan”

Having heard Yue’s cold words, Shia’s body trembled. While amazed by their appearance, Hajime continued his explanation.

“A~ I will say the conclusion. Inside human territory, I am protecting you by saying you’re a slave. If I didn’t do it, there’d be a lot of troubles and it’ll be all because of you”

“That is… … although I understand it…”

She understood the reason and merit. But, Shia had an unhappy expression, felt it hard to accept that after all. Because she had a strong yearning to be called their companion, she was unable to simply accept it. This time it was Yue who told Shia.

"… … Don't care what the small fries think of you"

"Yue-san?"

"… … The most important thing is it was enough if the ones important to you understand you. … … isn't it?"

"… … … … Th-that's right. That's right."

"… … Nn, even though I am reluctant… … Shia is someone I recognize as a companion… … Don't mind the small things"

"… … Yue-san… … ehehe. Thank you very much"

She was a vampire princess who wielded her power and listened to the masses. Even though she was betrayed, she found a new answer that even little words were able to carry a massive weight. That's why, her words were able to break the stone inside Shia's heart. All members of the Haulia tribe, even Hajime and Yue, understood that Shia has become important to Hajime and Yue. It was unnecessary to go through the trouble of getting 1,000 people to understand it. Of course, even if they could do it, there was no need to do that…

Having heard Yue's words, Shia shyly smiled while taking a peek at Hajime. She was expecting him to say something.

Hajime who felt it can't be helped, reluctantly started to spin his words.

"Well, I won't abandon you if you were attacked because they found out you're not a slave"

"Even if it will make everyone in this town your enemies?"

"You know, didn't I already do that with the Empire's soldiers?"

"Then, you'll do it even if the enemy was a country! Fufu!"

"What did you say? No matter even if it was the world or the gods it won't change anything. If it was an enemy, no matter who it is, I will fight"

"Kufufu, did you hear that? Yue-san. Did you hear what Hajime-san just said? We are important to him, right?"

"… … Hajime's only important person is me"

"Wa-, please read the mood! At this time, you should honestly say the usual "… … Nn"!"

Shia was happy and enjoying it, despite her complaints. Hearing that, when the time comes, he will even fight against the world. As expected it is something that'd make a woman happy. Especially if the other person was the one you're in love with.

Hajime who narrowed his eyes looked at the two playing with each other (or so it looks like to him), started to explain Shia's collar.

"One more thing, because that collar incorporates telepathy ore and a special ore, use it if you deem it necessary. It's able to be used by directly pouring magic into it"

"Telepathy ore and a special ore?"

Telepathy ore is a mineral that's able to transfer thoughts. It was an ore created by Creation magic that gave the user the skill "Telepathy", the amount of magic usage is proportional to the distance. Most of all, currently in this age there was nothing like telepathy or the telephone, so everyone who has the same ore within the range will be able to hear the secret talk.

The special ore itself was created using Creation magic to give the user the skill "Presence Perception"+ Specific Perception"". When Specific Perception was used, it is possible to catch only a specific presence among a crowd, and identify a presence among many. When it was used, it'd take the role as a beacon by pouring magic into it. The strength of the beacon is proportional to the amount of magic used.

Having heard Hajime's explanation, Shia raised a praising voice.

"By the way, that collar can be removed by giving it a certain amount of magic, you know?"

"I see~, in other words… … because you wanted to always hear my voice, and know my whereabouts, is that what Hajime-san felt? Mou, do you like me that much? As expected, it was a little too-, rather, ah, it's not like I hate i-Bbaberun!?"

"… … Don't get carried away"

"'Sob', I'b sobby"

With a beautiful picturesque curve, Yue's kick came flying into the back of Shia's head, who collapsed after yelling a strange scream. A cold voice could be heard from Yue. Even though she was weak at close combat… … Yue delivered a splendid high kick, then Shia apologized with tears in her eyes. Even if she recognized her as a journey companion, it seems she won't forgive her if Shia tried to approach Hajime. Most of all, it was questionable whether Shia's behaviour and speech could be called an approach.

With such a happy(?) mood, they continued walking on the main street until they discovered a signboard with a large sword drawn on it. It was the same signboard as the one seen in Hol-ad town's adventurer guild, although the scale was two sizes smaller than the one in Hol-ad.

After confirming the signboard, Hajime stepped inside by opening the door with composure.